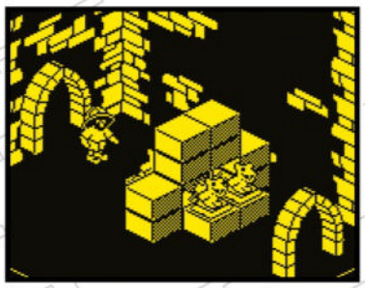
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

# retro GAMER



## THE LEGACY OF KNIGHT LORE

THE ISOMETRIC ZX SPECTRUM HIT THAT REVOLUTIONISED A GENRE

## ULTIMATE GUIDE: WAVE RACE 64

LIQUID GOLD: MAKING A BIG SPLASH AT THE N64 LAUNCH

# 20 YEARS OF THE PSP

## HOW SONY'S SLEEK PORTABLE SUPER-CHARGED THE WORLD OF HANDHELD GAMING

## THE BITMAP BROTHERS

MIKE MONTGOMERY TALKS XENON AND SPEEDBALL

## CREATING THE MOVIES

HOW HOLLYWOOD'S ERAS WERE RECREATED FOR PCS

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## ALIEN 3: THE GUN

WHY SEGA OUTGUNNED DAVID FINCHER'S SEQUEL

## THE STORY OF EARTHBOUND

UNCOVERING THE FASCINATING HISTORY OF APE'S RPG SERIES

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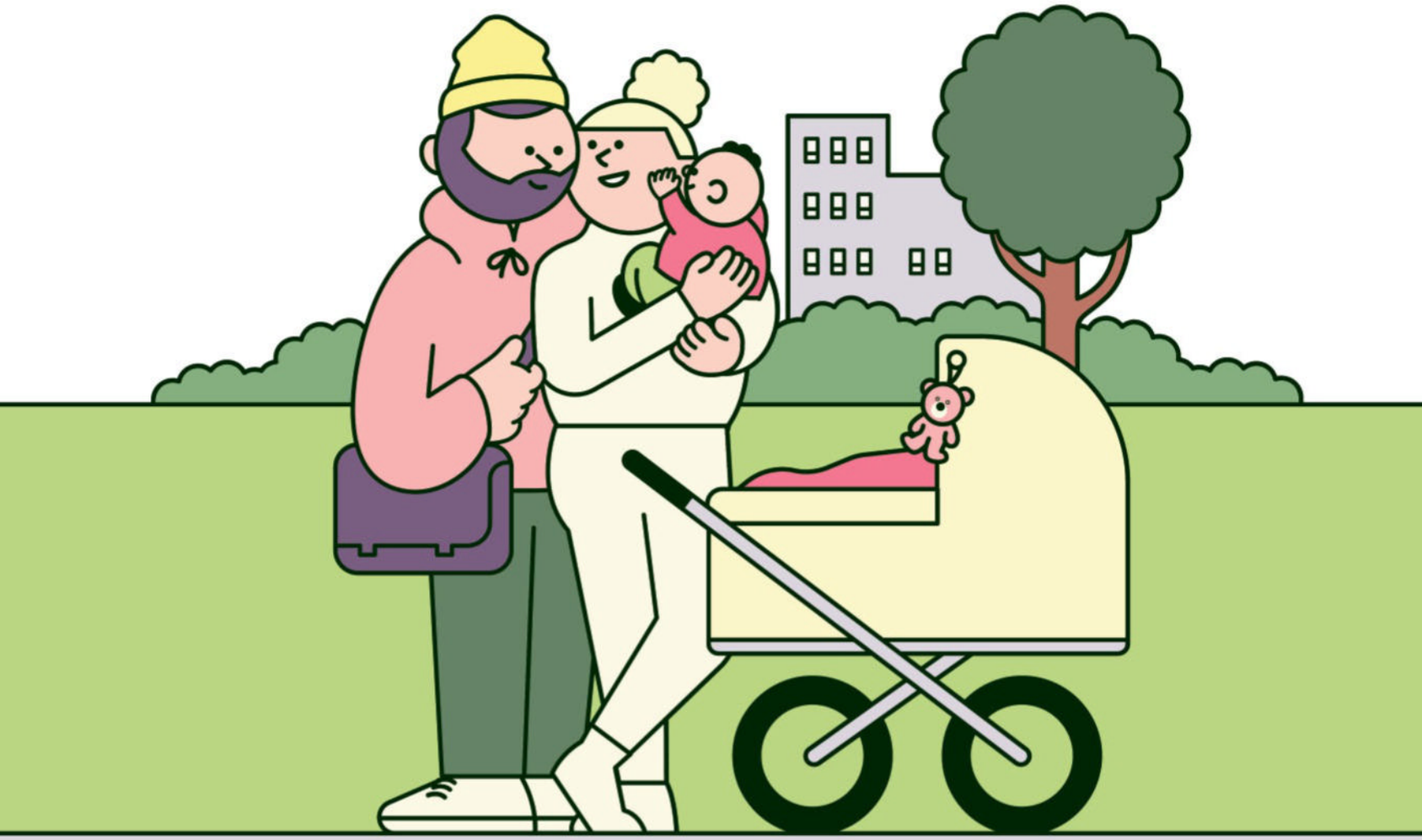

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# THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PSP GAME?

## DARRAN JONES

Being blown away by Sumo's incredibly ambitious port of the magnificent *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*. Playing *OutRun* in the palm of your hand felt outrageous.
**Expertise:** Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
**Currently playing:** *Patapon*
**Favourite game of all time:** *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

## TIM EMPEY

It has got to be *Power Stone Collection* because I never got to play them on the Dreamcast, so having both games was just excellent.
**Expertise:** Finishing Game Pass games before they go
**Currently playing:** *Elden Ring: Shadow Of The Erdtree*
**Favourite game of all time:** *God Hand*

## NICK THORPE

*WipEout Pure* not only returned one of my favourite series to form, but ably demonstrated the PSP's power and had loads of free DLC to boot.
**Expertise:** Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
**Currently playing:** Valkyria *Chronicles Remastered*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Sonic The Hedgehog*

## ANDY SALTER

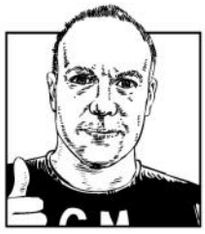
*Heaven Vs Hell*. Great game, even featured in the *South Park* episode Best Friends Forever… um, maybe it wasn't a real game.
**Expertise:** Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
**Currently modding:** *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

## ANDREW FISHER

*Dariusburst* – an excellent entry in the long-running series that makes great use of the PSP's landscape display.
**Expertise:** Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
**Currently playing:** *Rare Replay*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Wizball*

## MARTYN CARROLL

My favourite PSP game is Sumo Digital's amazing version of *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* – providing the PSP is running at 333MHz of course. Namco's *Ridge Racer 2* is a close second.
**Expertise:** Sinclair stuff
**Currently playing:** *Tunic*
**Favourite:** *Jet Set Willy*

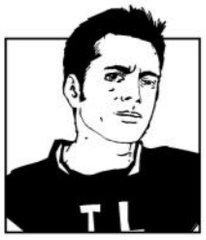


## GRAEME MASON

I really got into *Shinobido: Tales Of The Ninja* when I wrote **Retro Gamer**'s tribute to Acquire. It's not perfect, but a great stealth game for *Tenchu* fans such as myself.
**Expertise:** Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
**Currently playing:** *Still Wakes The Deep*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Resident Evil 4*

## RORY MILNE

As a PSP launch title and exclusive, *WipEout Pure* showed off Sony's portable and made it cool to own. I just love *Pure* for taking the series back to basics.
**Expertise:** The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
**Currently playing:** *Gyrus*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Tempest*




## IAIN LEE

*LocoRoco* – I've only just discovered it and have become obsessed with it.
**Expertise:** Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
**Currently playing:** *Super Meat Boy*
**Favourite game of all time:** *Elite* (BBC Model B)

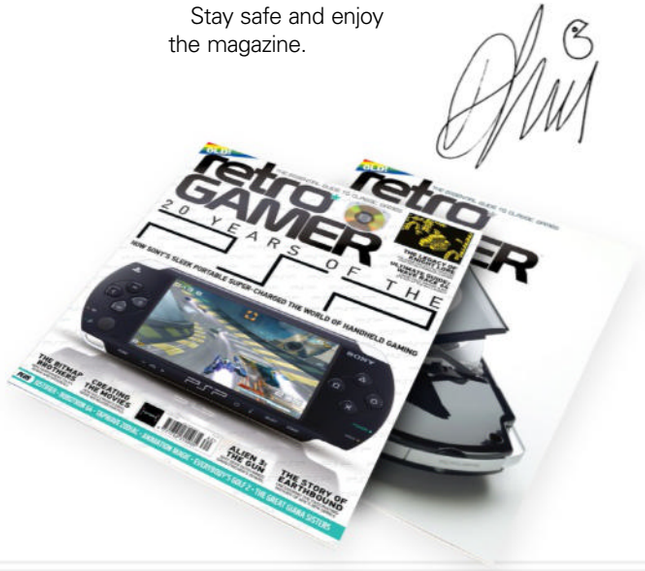
# LOADING...

**Has it really been 20 years since the release of Sony's first handheld?** I can still remember the day I received mine from Lik Sang, along with copies of *Lumines*, *Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower*, *Ridge Racer* and the excellent *Everybody's Golf* like it was yesterday. (I've still not forgotten paying an extra £100 for a 1GB proprietary memory card either.)

After constantly covering it in the news section of *games™* I was one of the first people in the office to own one and people would always come over from other magazines just to look at it and marvel at its screen and sheer graphical grunt. It really was a wonderfully impressive handheld for its time and an astonishing success for Sony, selling over 80 million units. It's a real delight then to speak to developers of the console who share their own memories about Sony's pretty small PlayStation.

If high-powered handhelds aren't your thing we've plenty of other retro goodness, including a 40-year retrospective on Ultimate's *Knight Lore*, a chat with Mike Montgomery about the many games from The Bitmap Brothers and the creation of *The Movies*. We also look at the history of *Earthbound* and the development studio behind the CD-i *Zelda* games, while our latest Ultimate Guides cover *Wave Race 64* and *Alien 3: The Gun*.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



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Freelancer Richard C Hewison tells us about his new passion project

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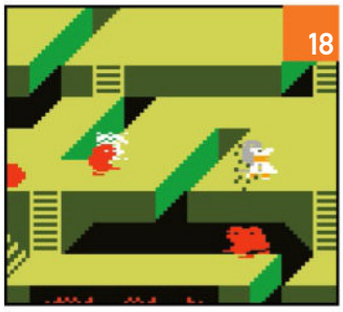
Nick's journey takes him to January 2008, but what will he find there?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## Ultimate Guide: Wave Race 64

James Tocchio returns to the spectacular Nintendo 64 launch game

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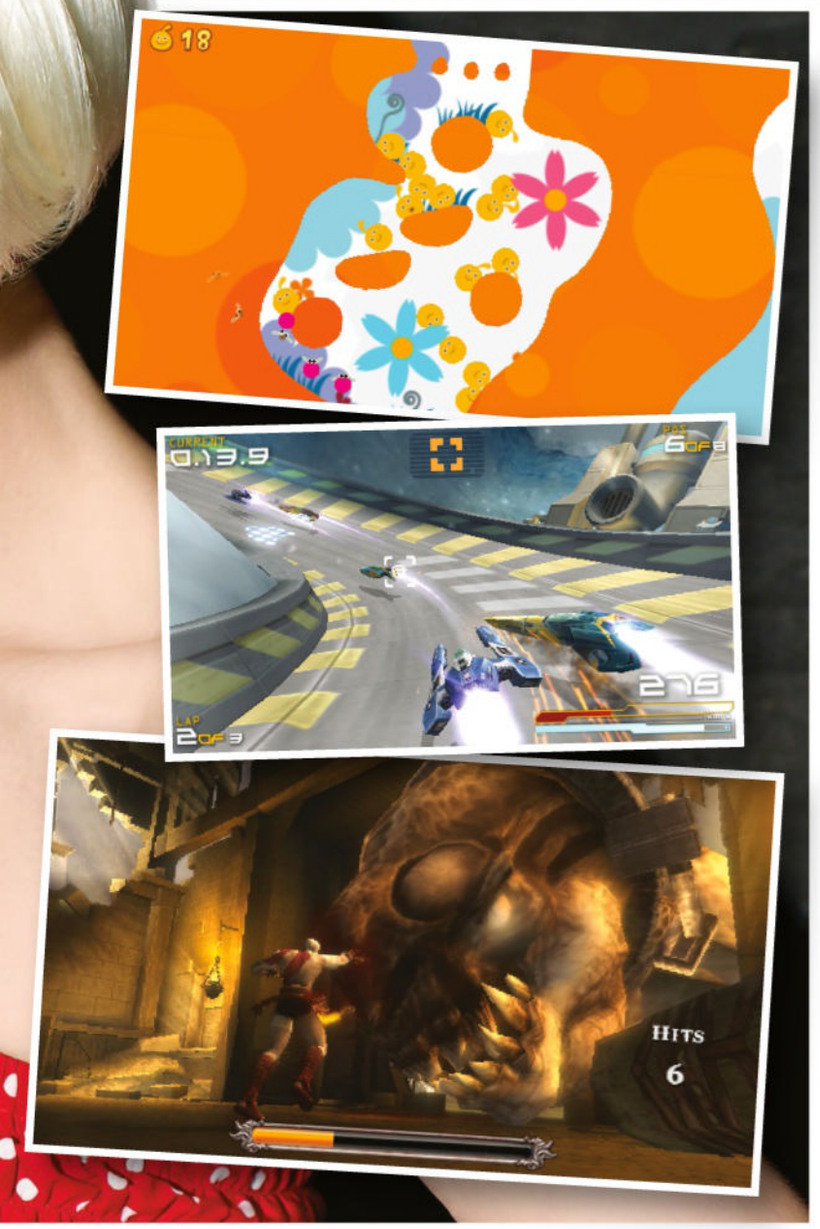

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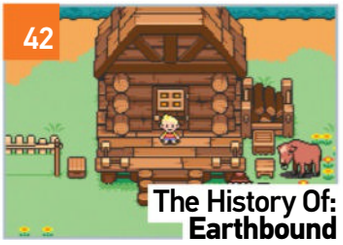
## The Legacy Of: Knight Lore

Developers explain how they were inspired by Ultimate's isometric masterpiece



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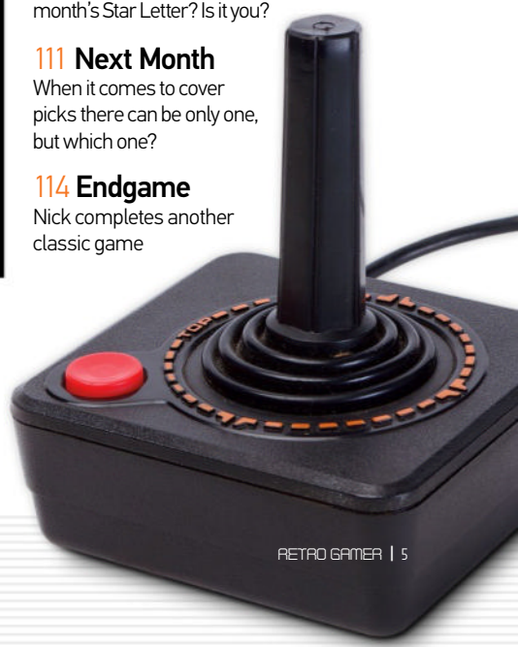
## A Tribute To: The Bitmap Brothers

Cofounder Mike Montgomery revisits the many games that defined the iconic software developer



» [Switch] *Mario & Luigi: Brotherhood* will be the third RPG starring Mario of 2024, following *Super Mario RPG* and *The Thousand-Year Door*.

# ONE FINAL PUSH

## If this is the Switch's last full year it's going to be a good one

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We look at the latest Switch releases from Nintendo and Limited Run Games

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What will Nick discover when he investigates 2008? You'll have to turn to page 16 to find out

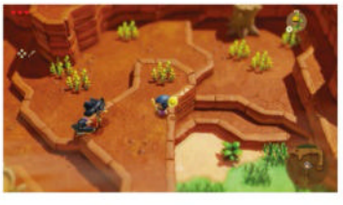
**The Switch may be over seven years old now, but the latest Nintendo Direct proves there's still plenty of life left in the ageing console.**

The clear highlight of the show was saved for last, as Nintendo revealed the first proper look at *Metroid Prime 4: Beyond* as the show closed. Yes it looks a little rough around the edges and no firm release date suggests it's most likely going to be doubling up as a launch game for the Switch's successor, but we are still excited by how Samus' latest adventure is shaping up.

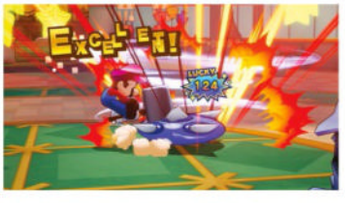
Equally exciting is the fact we're getting a new *Zelda* game, but this time around, it's Zelda who has the main starring role (she's not led a *Zelda* game since the CD-i game *Wand Of Gamelon*). *The Legend Of Zelda: Echoes Of Wisdom* is due to launch this September and focusses on a new mechanic called Echoes, which are essentially copies of items that Zelda can interact with. By using her Tri Rod Zelda will have to tackle the game's monsters in numerous inventive ways and rely on her puzzle-solving skills if she ever wants to be reunited with Link.

Zelda and Samus weren't the only Nintendo heroes to be starring in new games, as Mario and Luigi are also teaming up for a brand-new adventure. *Mario & Luigi: Brothership* is the latest game in the long-running series and has a distinct nautical theme with the brothers tackling a number of islands in their latest quest. Nintendo promises new evolved moves for the brothers, which you'll be able to experience for yourself when the game arrives in November. Donkey Kong is also looking to leap onto the Switch with a remake of *Donkey Kong Country Returns*. There's no denying it's a great game, but a HD update and the extra levels of the 3DS port makes this seem quite a stretch for the £50 asking price.

Other highlights of the Nintendo show included a HD-2D update of *Dragon Quest III* from Squaresoft, with the promise that similar remakes of the first two games are also currently in the works, an excellent new *Marvel Vs Capcom* collection that features seven fantastic brawlers, the *Ace Attorney Investigations Collection*, which features two games starring Miles Edgeworth and a 3D remake of *Romancing SaGa 2*.



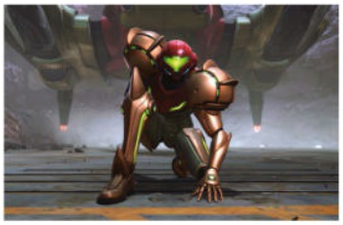
» [Switch] Zelda hasn't had a starring role in a *Zelda* game since *Zelda: The Wand Of Gamelon*.



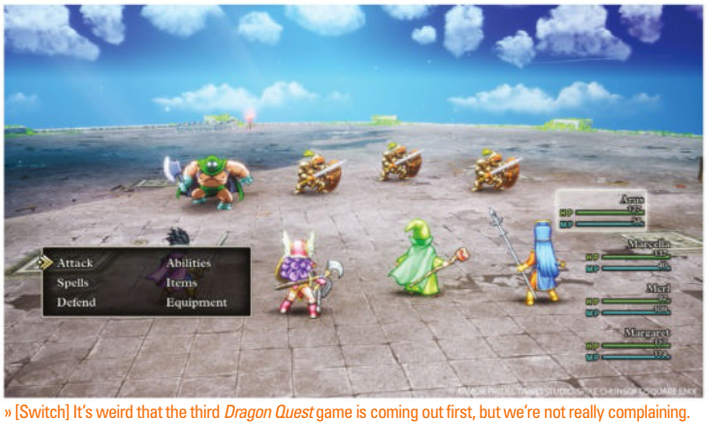
» The new version of *Tomba!* is another welcome addition, as the PAL and US originals are very expensive to acquire.

» It's a shame Limited Run Games isn't reissuing the original Game Boy Advance game, but this is still a great to see.

» [Switch] This is the second full-price release of *Donkey Kong Country Returns*. It's a great game, but feels a little lazy all the same.



» [Switch] If *Metroid Prime 4: Beyond* isn't a dual release on Switch and Switch 2 we'll eat our Switch collections.




» [Switch] It's weird that the third *Dragon Quest* game is coming out first, but we're not really complaining.

The Nintendo Direct wasn't the only source of excitement for Switch fans, as Limited Run Games announced numerous retro-themed games it is planning to publish throughout the rest of 2024 and early 2025. By far the biggest is the fact that *Ninja Five-O* is getting a physical release on Switch, PS4, PS5 and PC. Preorders for the physical release close on 4 August, so grab it while you can. The original GBA release (known as *Ninja Cop* in Europe) is hideously expensive now, so this is a welcome alternative.

Unfortunately, physical releases of *Star Wars: Dark Forces Remaster* are no longer available to preorder, but you can still preorder *Beyond Good & Evil 20th Anniversary Edition* on Switch, PS4, PS5, Xbox Series S/X and PC as that closes on 11 August. *Tomba! Special Edition* for Switch and PS4 also goes off sale shortly. Other physical releases from Limited Run Games to look out for in the coming months include a collection of the first three *Valis* games, *Cosmic Fantasy Collection 2*, which will contain three more games from the series and *Assault Suit Leynos 2: Saturn Tribute*. Limited Run Games will also be releasing physical copies of the excellent *Penny's Big Breakaway*, *Snow Bros: Wonderland*, *Gimmick! 2* and a physical Switch release of *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*.

» If you're prepared to wait, there's an impressive-looking version of *Beyond Good & Evil* on the way that fans will love.

> "We are still excited by how Samus' latest adventure is shaping up"

The studio has faced a fair amount of criticism in recent times due to *D* on 3DO being burned onto CD-Rs and quality issues with some of its *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* vinyls. Then there's the long delay of some of its special editions and games (*Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood* was first announced in 2021). CEO Josh Fairhurst recently admitted in an interview with the YouTube channel Phoenix Resale that they're aware of accusations from customers that they favour quanity over quality. "There's absolutely merit to that," he said. We got way too overzealous during [the pandemic] in terms of signing too many games, and we got into a bit where I almost feel we were doing things without passion."

Hopefully, the passion has returned and quality control and shipping will continue to improve, as there's no denying that Limited Run Games, like Nintendo, is intent on making a large number of legacy titles available to as many gamers as possible.

## A TRIBUTE TO ANDY DYER

There was sad news in the retro-gaming community recently with the passing of Andy Dyer, a veteran of several beloved UK gaming magazines. Andy first rose to fame in the Nineties and started off as a writer for the popular *Commodore Format*. He soon teamed up with Steve Jarrett to create a brand-new magazine for Future Publishing called *Total!*, which was dedicated to Nintendo's numerous consoles. His work at Future was prolific, including an eventual editor position on the aforementioned *Total!*, editor of the Sega magazine *MEGA*, roles on the likes of *PlayStation Max* and a later editorial role on Imagine Publishing's *N-Revolution*, which closed in 2008. As you can imagine there was a great outpouring of appreciation for Andy online, with Andy Roberts, CEO of Thalamus Digital, sharing the following on Twitter. "Shocked and deeply saddened to learn that Andy Dyer (former colleague on *Commodore Format*) has passed away. Working with Andy in those early days was an utter joy, and I still often think about those wonderful times. Godspeed, Andy."

Our thoughts go out to Andy's friends and family at this difficult time.

**Who is Iain Lee?**
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

# The need to please

**If you sign up to a service like Game Pass on the Xbox, then you're getting hundreds of games for free.** I know, I know. They're not really free. It's like saying the NHS is free. Yeah, it's free at the point of contact but you pay for it through taxes. And it's the same with Game Pass. You pay for it through taxes. Or something like that. But it does mean when I log in on Xbox, I can spend ages scrolling through all of the bloody awful things on there trying to find the half-decent one. Very reminiscent of standing in Blockbusters at 8.30pm on a Saturday desperately looking for something that wasn't *She's Out Of Control* or *Cliffhanger*.

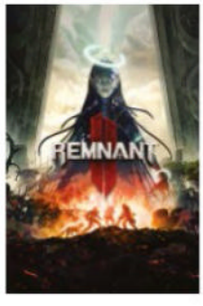
I didn't have that option as a kid. If I was lucky, my parents would buy me a game on average once a month. This was long before my Saturday job at Bejams and by the time I was earning my sights had moved from games to booze. So if you chose a game, that was it. You were stuck with it. Very early on Boots and WHSmith got wise to the buying, tape to taping, returning cycle and put a stop to it.

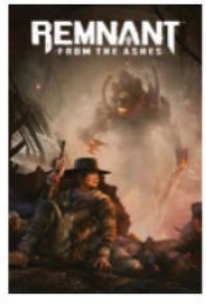
A lot of the time, this was OK. I seem to remember being happy with most of the stuff I got. You have to remember that the Eighties were crap. Ignore what *Stranger Things* and other revisionist shows try to tell you. I was there. They were grim. However, if you got a dud then you were stuck with it. I also didn't have the option of just chucking it under the bed and forgetting about it. I was a weird kid and felt obliged to play the game because my parents had spent money on it. They couldn't care less and certainly didn't know, but I felt I had this overwhelming responsibility towards them. Don't worry, I've talked it through in therapy and I'm over that now (hope that's OK with you mum!).

The one game that springs to mind when I think of duds is *Combat Lynx* by Durell Software. Before you all kick off, THIS IS JUST MY OPINION. If you like it, that's great. You're wrong, but that's great. I think I was seduced by the sexy big box. Solid, great picture and a lovely thick plastic cover. It just looked so grown up. I was grown up! I was the ripe old age of 11. I just turned 51 in June, so this happened 40 years ago. Oh my.

> "The Eighties were crap. Ignore what Stranger Things and other revisionist shows try to tell you. I was there. They were grim"

I found it SO DULL. Slow, ponderous, boring. A lot of effort had clearly gone into it, and it was very advanced for its time. But I got zero fun out of it. However, because of that weird need to please, I kept playing it and getting absolutely nowhere with it. The funny thing is, I still think really fondly of that game and wonder if I played it now, would I feel any different about it? The answer is almost definitely no, but, oh God, I think I need more therapy. ✱





**Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:**

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**Who is Paul Rose?**
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

# Pure and simple

**How do you enjoy yours?** No, I'm not talking about Cadbury's Crème Eggs. This is a videogames magazine, so that'd be a weird question to open with. Obviously, I'm talking about games.

See, I've never been one for high scores. I never understand the appeal. When we moved away from an era where the arcades dominated, and every game celebrated scores, it was a good day for me. I mean, having grown up as one of the kids who was picked last when they were choosing the sides at school, high scores always felt a bit too merit and skills-focussed, and spoke to something more cerebral than the imagination that games stoked in me.

Oh, there have been exceptions; *Geometry Wars* on the Xbox 360 somehow managed to sink its wire-frame vectors into me. I became obsessive about beating my previous best, to the degree that I would lose my temper and restart if I lost a life too early on.

Also, while I'm hardly alone in being addicted to *Tetris* back in the early Nineties, Christmas 1990 was dominated by me ignoring my family while trying to top my highest line count… Which was fine, because when I wasn't on the Game Boy, someone else in my family would pick it up and get similarly sucked into doing the same. We were a family of addicts. And yet… I struggle to think of any other games beyond those two in which I was playing simply for the numbers. It's just how I'm wired. On the rare occasions I got a high score on an arcade game, I took little pride in it, but it at least meant I could input my name as 'BUM'.

Admittedly, it could speak to a wider issue with my brain. Maths was not exactly my strongest subject at school, and it still isn't. It's not that I can't do maths – I'm fine with arithmetic – more that I look at a load of numbers and my brain goes into a sort of panic, and tries to run away. Not just numbers, but number-adjacent things too, like levels where you're against the clock, or lap times, or games which are particularly statistics-heavy.

It has meant whole swathes of the gaming experience have been cut off for me. I've never been tempted to do a speedrun of *Sonic 2*. I don't love many racing games and have never felt an urge to beat my best lap times. I mostly loved the original *Mario Kart* on the SNES for its Battle Mode, and my favourite racing games have been ones where you were rewarded for crashing; the *Burnout* and *Destruction Derby* series specifically.

I also generally have no need to complete a game to 100%. Only *Crackdown 2* on the Xbox 360 saw me scouring its open-world sandbox to find every last orb. I think, though, that was purely once I'd already managed to significantly power-up my sci-fi super-cop, and so having an excuse to just travel around the city was a lot of fun.

And all of this… is fine. We're all different. We enjoy games differently. Although, I have one friend who tries to get around in the *GTA* games without violating any traffic laws, unless a mission specifically requires it, and that is legitimately weird. *

> "High scores always felt a bit too merit and skills-focussed, and spoke to something more cerebral than the imagination that games stoked in me"

**Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:**

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

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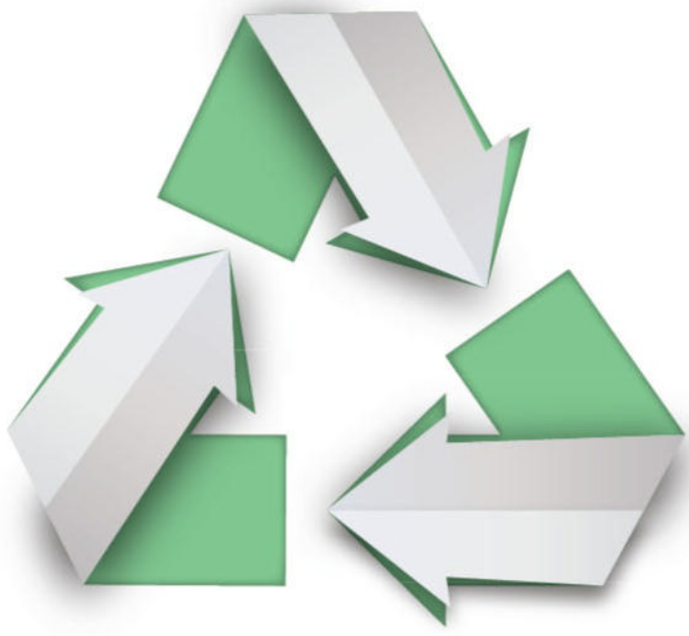

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MEMORIES OF FIREBIRD




Acornsoft's *Elite* artwork, by Philip Castle (1984).

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» Richard C Hewison's new book has been decades in the making.

Image courtesy of Jason Scott

### 3: ELITIST AMBITIONS

Next on Telecomsoft's agenda was finding someone to take on the task of running Firebird and progressing the brand. The man for the job was James Scoular, only recently promoted to Publisher at VNU Publications, based in nearby Oxford Street in central London. VNU produced many magazines, including the weekly *Personal Computer News* and the monthly titles *Personal Computer Games* and *Personal Computer World*.

Scoular was in his late 20s and had started his career selling advertising space. A rapid rise through the ranks had seen him move to advertising manager and then publisher in the space of six months, but he recognised the opportunity at Telecomsoft to join a new and dynamic business on the rise, in a totally new form of publishing. The allure was too strong to resist, and he applied for the advertised post, leaving VNU and joining Telecomsoft just a few months before Firebird's launch titles appeared in the shops.

'James was a complete outsider but fitted the BT senior management bill and image,' explains James Leavey. 'He had a good overview of the UK games market.'

Tony Rainbird understood that BT wanted to bring in a graduate into that managerial role, that expectation having already been set when

Below: James Scoular (1985).





Above: a screenshot from Acornsoft's *Elite* (BBC).

he arrived. 'When I was recruited,' he says, 'I came in at a level that would normally require a degree or qualifications, so I did have to sign an employment waiver of some sort; but my job was always intended to be permanent.' There was no clear plan for his future responsibilities, but Rainbird's remit would develop as the business grew.

Shortly after James Scoular arrived, Robert Stallibras was recruited as Firebird's first Sales Manager, also joining from VNU Publications. A new management team was forming, and they began laying the groundwork for a plan to elevate the label's status. Events elsewhere meant they had a real chance to accelerate those ambitions by entering an auction to publish conversions of a hugely successful game that Acornsoft had recently released for the BBC Micro and the Acorn Electron. Its developers were Cambridge undergraduates Ian Bell and David Braben, and the game was called *Elite*.

*Elite* was a landmark title because of its open-ended design, featuring trading, space combat and 3D wireframe graphics set in a futuristic sci-fi universe. There was nothing else like it at the time. It was published by Acornsoft

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» As you'd expect, major titles like *Elite* get plenty of coverage in the book.

# Richard C Hewison

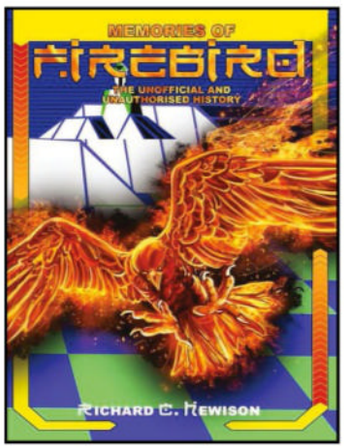
## How a former employee is keeping Firebird's memory alive

**Over a lengthy career in games, Richard C Hewison has been a project manager, a game tester, worked on the original PlayStation and often writes for Retro Gamer.** That journey began at Telecomsoft in the late-Eighties, and now Richard has chronicled the company's Firebird publishing label in a new book, *Memories Of Firebird*. We caught up with him to find out more about this latest venture.

**How did the *Memories Of Firebird* project first get started?**
Well, technically it started back in 1999 when I first decided that the history behind Firebird and Rainbird needed to be told by people who were there. By then my day job was in IT and I was getting involved with researching and setting up a web server, and so learning to write my own website gave birth to The Bird Sanctuary, which began to tell the tale. Even back then I had a book in mind, but a website was the best way to start redressing the balance. A few years after the site went live, I got the chance to write an article in a very early issue of **Retro Gamer**, and I then wrote two further articles in later years, but the urge to do a proper book was still there. Fast-forward to lockdown, and I was forced into a situation where I had a lot of spare time on my hands, so I started writing the book in earnest.

**How long has the project taken to complete?**
I started writing the book in the summer of 2020 at the same time as I retired my website, but the research I'd done previously along with my own personal memories of working there means that it's really taken about 25 years to reach the point where the book is finally getting published. It took a while to find the right publisher, but the fact that the book I'd written was rather large and needed serious editing meant I needed to split the story and concentrate on Firebird. I've been editing it for the last few years and still managed to squeeze in some last-minute content before it had to be finalised.

**For readers who aren't so familiar with Firebird and Telecomsoft, what makes the publishing label and company so interesting?**
My website and the earlier articles only briefly touched on the reasons why BT decided to have a go at games publishing in the early Eighties. The industry was young, with new computers coming out every few months, and many people were setting up as publishers and developers. It was uncharted territory, and that kind of entrepreneurship attracted several large corporations to get into games publishing, including Thorn EMI, Virgin, the Mirror Group and




» *Memories Of Firebird* is the culmination of 25 years of work on Richard's part.

> "The book really gives the reader a flavour of what it was like back in those early days"
>
> **RICHARD C HEWISON**

» [Amiga] *The Sentinel* is just one of the many memorable games that bore the Firebird logo.

British Telecom. Telecomsoft gave anyone with an inclination to writing games a chance to be published and start a career in computing. So many people got their first break with Firebird and the budget range, and the book really gives the reader a flavour of what it was like back in those early days and who were the people behind the company and the games.

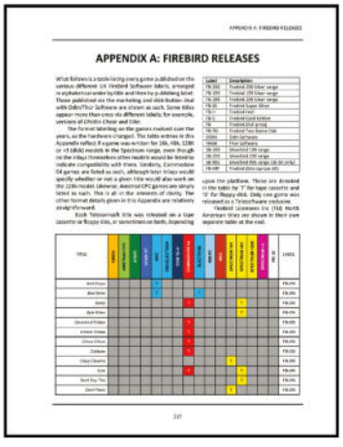
**You've spoken to a variety of people to get their memories of the company. Who should readers expect to see?**

Firebird published games from some very well-known names in the industry, including Ian Bell and David Braben, Geoff Crammond and Peter Molyneux to mention just a few. Those people and their games are rightly discussed in the book, but I really wanted *Memories Of Firebird* to give the reader a chance to discover the stories behind some of the other games as well. I spoke to several game authors who were also there right at the start, and their memories and anecdotes have never been chronicled before.

**The spreads we've seen have some interesting additional information, such as the appendix listing all Firebird releases. Is there anything else of a similar nature in the book?**

Apart from a complete list of known releases for all formats, the book also includes a comprehensive gallery showing the cover of every different game from the UK and North American subsidiaries. There is also a chapter dedicated to the US operation, which was the first UK software publisher to have a game hit the number 1 spot in the American Billboard Software charts and stay there for four straight months in 1986. If you know your Firebird games, it doesn't take a genius to work out which game that was! The book is full-colour throughout and is over 270 pages of pure nostalgia.

» [ZX Spectrum] Interviewees include Shahid Ahmad, who explains how *Chimera* was inspired by *Knight Lore*.




» Here's a look at the appendix that lists every UK Firebird release – useful info for any fan.

» Some candid photos are included in the book, with more to be released online as a bonus.

**Were there any stories you unearthed that still managed to surprise you, given that you were around to see things first-hand?**

Absolutely. I wasn't there at the start, so doing extra research uncovered lots of new memories and stories, including some unexpected revelations. Sometimes, people's recollections don't always tally with others, so where there are contradictions I've tried to give balance to those memories by providing both sides. The hope is that the book celebrates what was achieved by Firebird, gives a fair and accurate account of what happened, and gives the reader an appreciation and peek at what it was like. It's also quite sad that several people who helped with my research are no longer with us to see the end result. The further away we get from the events, the fewer people there are around to remember what happened, and the memories begin to fade. If the book performs well, then a second volume covering Rainbird and Beyond Software is waiting in the wings, and will hopefully follow in the not-too-distant future. ✱

***Memories Of Firebird* is available for pre-order at telos.co.uk**

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But it's not just the names you know. Given how easy and enjoyable it is to make games with our free SDK, there are tons of new titles from people all around the world. And new ones keep coming out! We put the best of them in our own game store that we call **Catalog**.

## Crankin's Time Travel Adventure

**by uvula**

Keita Takahashi saw the Playdate crank and decided to make a game that uses no other control—forget the buttons and get ready to crank to your date with Crankette.

## Mars After Midnight

**by Lucas Pope**

The most eagerly anticipated new Playdate game is here—it's a charming, silly, gorgeous take on what it's like to be alien, and what's it like to be human.

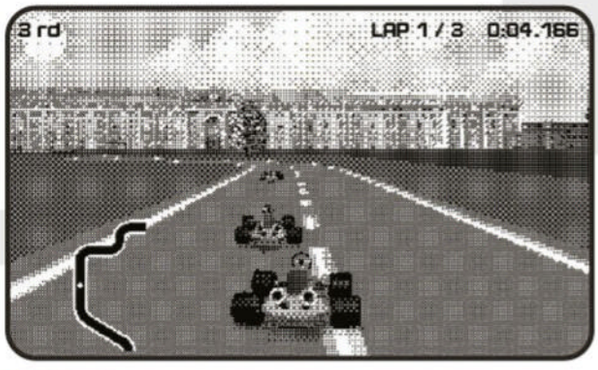
## Root Bear by TEAM ROOT

Root Bear became an overnight sensation on TikTok, and it's easy to see why: it's the perfect game to share with friends. Approachable, immediately understandable, and extremely funny.

## Grand Tour Legends

by IORAMA

A video game that feels exactly like bicycling, balancing your speed and stamina. Crank along to its krautrock soundtrack and you'll feel the wind in your bibs.

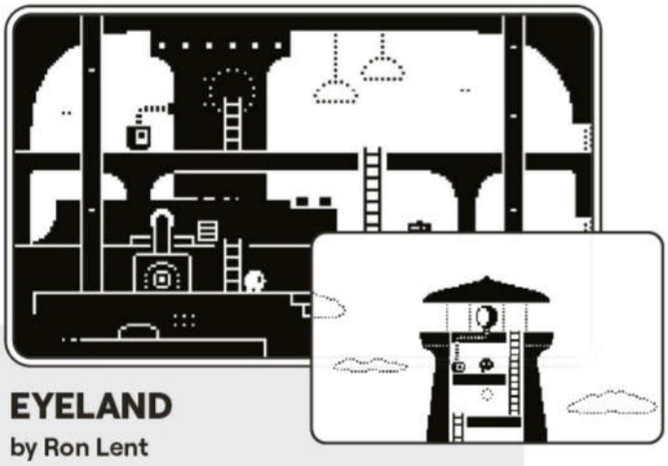



## P-Racing by Risolvi Productions

A pinnacle of technical achievement on the Playdate. Its ghost system lets you race against friends and competitors from the Playdate community. It's easy to lose track of time while you're shaving seconds off your track records.

## PullFrog PLAYDATE-DELUXE by Amano

Imagine being trapped inside a falling-bricks game. Now also imagine that you are in fact a long-tongued frog. That's just how good this game is!



## EYELAND

by Ron Lent

This short and charming lo-fi adventure features light puzzles, marvelous visuals, and soothing chirps. Its highly anticipated sequel is already in development!

## What The Crow?! by Lumicreative

Play as a little crow who is a little bit angry and a bit bitter. Why is he so angry and causing trouble? Find out in this smash-and-bash side platformer.

And remember, there are **more than 200 other original, amazing Playdate games in Catalog**, our game store available on-device and at play.date/games. You can even crank to buy them! Thanks for reading. Have fun!

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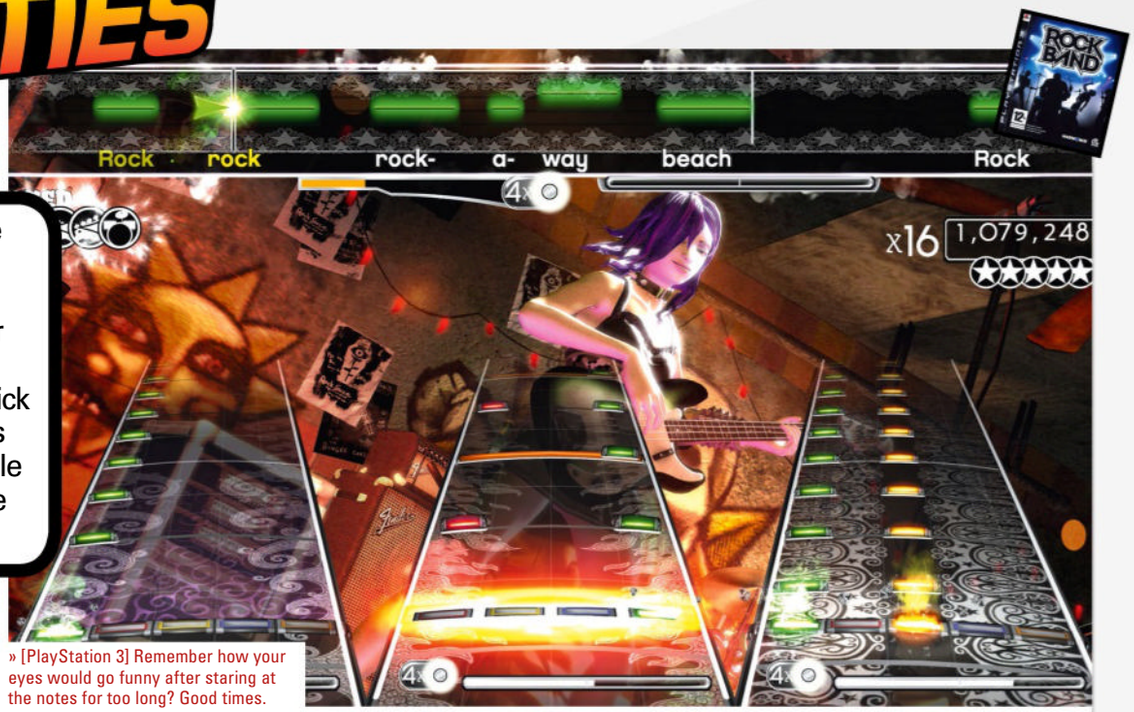
# BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES




» [PlayStation 3] Remember how your eyes would go funny after staring at the notes for too long? Good times.

**JANUARY 2008** – Are those shambling zombies from Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles, or just hungover revellers dancing to Rock Band and Guitar Hero III? Nick Thorpe's beardy face is here, providing valuable familiarity in a strange new year

## NEWS JANUARY 2008

**The first episode of *Breaking Bad* aired in the USA on 20 January.** The show stars Bryan Cranston as Walter White, a chemistry teacher who begins dealing in illicit drugs to provide for his family's long-term future, following a late-stage cancer diagnosis. Though critically praised, the show drew a modest initial audience of 1.41 million viewers.

Australian actor Heath Ledger passed away at the age of 28 on 22 January, due to an accidental overdose of prescription drugs. After a TV career including a stint on *Home And Away*, Ledger found fame in films including *A Knight's Tale* and *Brokeback Mountain*. His death preceded the release of the Batman movie *The Dark Knight*, in which he portrayed the Joker – a performance for which he posthumously received an Oscar.

On 30 January, TV presenter Jeremy Beadle passed away at the age of 59 following a short battle with pneumonia. Beadle was well known for presenting shows involving practical jokes such as *Game For A Laugh* and *Beadle's About*, as well as the home video show *You've Been Framed*. The BBC reported that Beadle "is thought to have raised more than £100 million for all charities," work for which he received an MBE.

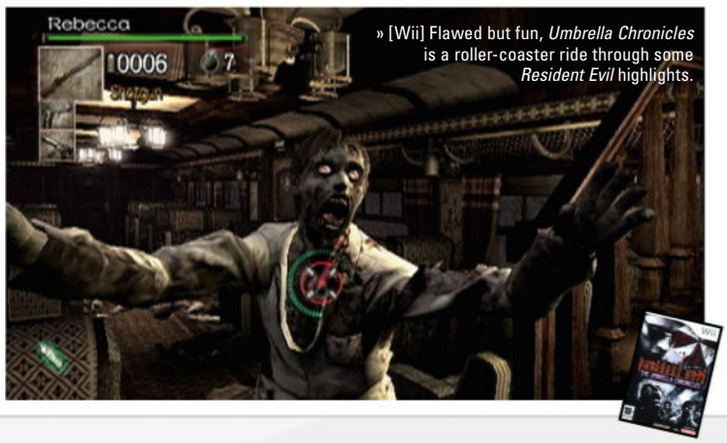
# THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 2008

**You know how things go in the music business – when the money starts rolling in, success can drive bands apart.** That was certainly the case for *Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock*, the first game in the series to be developed by Neversoft. *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* praised the new co-op Career Mode and the use of original artist recordings over cover versions, but criticised the wireless controllers in a 9/10 review. This game marked the series' debut on both the PC and Wii, and earned 81% from *PC Gamer* and 8.8/10 from *nRevolution* respectively. *X360* gave a 9/10 score, proving the game's appeal across various formats.

Not to be outdone, *Guitar Hero*'s original developer Harmonix fired back with *Rock Band* on the Xbox 360, which expanded beyond guitars to include vocals and drums. Although *Edge* had minor quibbles with those new parts of the game, it felt that *Rock Band* was "not only an evolution of the genre but of the social side of gaming itself" when played with four players, and gave it 9/10. *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* and *Official PlayStation Magazine* likewise gave it 9/10. The only downside was that being import reviews, UK players would have to wait for months to get their hands on the game.

PS3 owners didn't have anything of their own to shout about this month, and PC players only had a port of Rare's quirky *Viva Piñata*, which scored 83% in *PC Gamer*. Quirky was certainly the order of the day in *Beautiful Katamari*, the latest entry in Namco's roll-'em-up series. *360* was pleased to see some more Japanese representation on the console, "innovation and style and craziness intact," and gave it 4/5. *OXM* felt that the short length of the game, combined with Namco's decision to sell DLC stages at 200 Microsoft Points each, was "cause for a frown" but not detrimental enough to drag down its 8/10 score.

The Wii, doing its own thing in typical Nintendo fashion, was having a lightgun revival thanks to the new Zapper, packaged with *Link's Crossbow Training*. The




» [Wii] Flawed but fun, *Umbrella Chronicles* is a roller-coaster ride through some *Resident Evil* highlights.

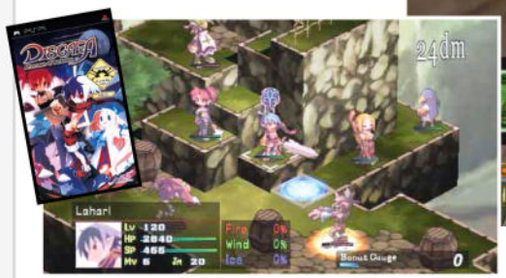
*Zelda*-themed minigame package scored reasonably well, earning 7.2/10 from *nRevolution* and 81% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*. Sega launched a conversion of its arcade hit *Ghost Squad*, in which you play as a member of the titular counter-terrorist unit. The game scored 7.6/10 in *nRevolution* and 6/10 in *Edge*, the latter complaining that it was "one of the briefest challenges on Wii".

The main event was *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*, which adapted classic stories from Capcom's survival horror universe into a lightgun format. *Edge* felt that the game controlled well, but that bosses were too simple, giving it 7/10. By contrast, *nRevolution* and *games™* complained of poor pacing, with the latter describing the opening *Resident Evil 0* section as "all too slow". They were joined in their complaints about the control system by *ONM*, which felt that the game "plays so much better without" the Zapper. Despite these flaws, *games™* felt that it was "one of the most complete lightgun experiences you'll see on a home console" and gave it 7/10, with *nRevolution* giving 8.2/10 and *ONM* giving 88%.

Strategy was the order of the day on Sony's PSP, with *Football Manager Handheld 2008* dividing opinion. *OPM* gave it 8/10, feeling that the addition of reserve teams and custom formations improved on previous entries, but *Play* gave it 49% and opined that "the PSP can't offer the processing power required to make a half-decent management game". If you preferred giving orders to squads of explosive penguins over men in shorts, you would have been thrilled with *Disgaea: Afternoon Of Darkness*, a port of the PS2 strategy RPG. The game received 92% in *Play* and 8/10 in *OPM*, the latter praising enhancements including a multiplayer mode and the ability to play as the popular character Etna.

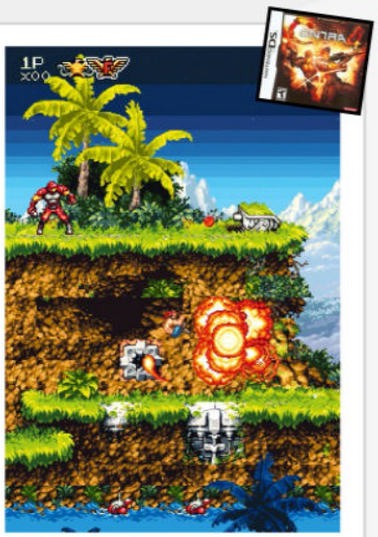
Finally, *Contra 4* made its way to the DS. WayForward's run-and-gun had "more depth and balls-to-the-wall action than any other DS release of a similar nature" according to the 8/10 review in *games™*, but *Edge* wished that it was "less of a slavish homage to its predecessors" and gave it 6/10. Sadly, Konami never deemed European players worthy of taking on the challenging game.

Join us again next month, when a beloved racing franchise arrives on the HD consoles with an almighty crash. ✱




» [PSP] If you love little sprites and big numbers, *Disgaea* is exactly the kind of game you'll enjoy.

» [Wii] We think the mags were a bit harsh on *Ghost Squad* – it's an excellent game with tremendous replay value.



» [DS] Maybe Konami thought we'd be expecting a *Probotector* game and wouldn't know *Contra*?

## CHARTS

### JANUARY 2008

**XBOX 360**

1 – **Assassin's Creed** (Ubisoft)
2 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)
3 – **Halo 3** (Microsoft)
4 – **WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2008** (THQ)
5 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 2008** (Konami)

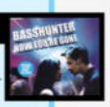
**WII**

1 – **Super Mario Galaxy** (Nintendo)
2 – **Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games** (Sega)
3 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
4 – **Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree** (Nintendo)
5 – **High School Musical: Sing It!** (Disney)

**PC**

1 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)
2 – **Football Manager 2008** (Sega)
3 – **Crysis** (EA)
4 – **Unreal Tournament 3** (Midway)
5 – **The Sims 2: Bon Voyage** (EA)

**MUSIC**



1 – **Now You're Gone** (Basshunter)
2 – **Piece Of Me** (Britney Spears)
3 – **Crank That** (Soulja Boy Tell'em)
4 – **Rockstar** (Nickelback)
5 – **When You Believe** (Leon Jackson)

## THIS MONTH IN...

### Official Nintendo Magazine

Shigeru Miyamoto has been known to flip a table or two during game development. However, he confirms that the development of *Super Mario Galaxy* "all went pretty much according to plan without major *chabudai gaeshi*".

### Official PlayStation 2 Magazine

Members of the mag's Facebook group have started a campaign to bring Sega's voice-controlled virtual pet game *Seaman 2* to the UK. "We've prepared suitable puns for the review, should it ever happen," we're assured.

### games™

The cover story is an exclusive preview of *Command & Conquer* FPS spin-off *Tiberium*. "It already seems unlikely that we'll end up with another *Renegade* on our hands," says the mag. Indeed – the game was cancelled later in 2008.

# Diner

## WORTH A MICHELIN STAR






» INTELLIVISION » 1987 » REALTIME ASSOCIATES

**The North American videogame market crash of 1983 killed certain consoles dead, but the Intellivision wasn't one of them – INTV Corporation bought the rights to the format from Mattel Electronics in 1984, and provided decent support for the console through the rest of the Eighties.** Of course, by 1987 the console wasn't exactly going to challenge the emerging dominance of the NES, and so new games would have passed most people by. *Diner* deserves your attention though, as it's not only a console-exclusive sequel to *BurgerTime*, but a really good one.

In many ways, Peter Pepper's task is a familiar one – you direct him around the maze, dropping food to the bottom while avoiding marauding food. The biggest difference is the 3D play area that he now inhabits, which you've probably noticed from the screenshot, and it's more than a cosmetic makeover as it reduces the number of frustrating situations in which you end up completely trapped, and allows for innovations like elevators. Better yet, the switch to food balls gives you more options for attacking enemies – where the burger ingredients could only go one way in the original game, you can kick them left or right and knock them down ledges and stairs.

What's particularly interesting about *Diner* is that the 3D stages were originally intended for the unreleased *Masters Of The Universe II*, and repurposed years later when INTV decided that it wanted a *BurgerTime* sequel. It certainly worked out well as *Diner* is a real winner, but it's one that has been absent from products like Intellivision Lives and the Intellivision Evercade cartridges, likely because of rights issues. Hopefully Atari will manage to find a way to reissue it in its new role as the custodian of the Intellivision legacy, because there's no doubt that fans of *BurgerTime* and those who stuck with the console were eating well with this one.

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# 20 YEARS OF THE PSP

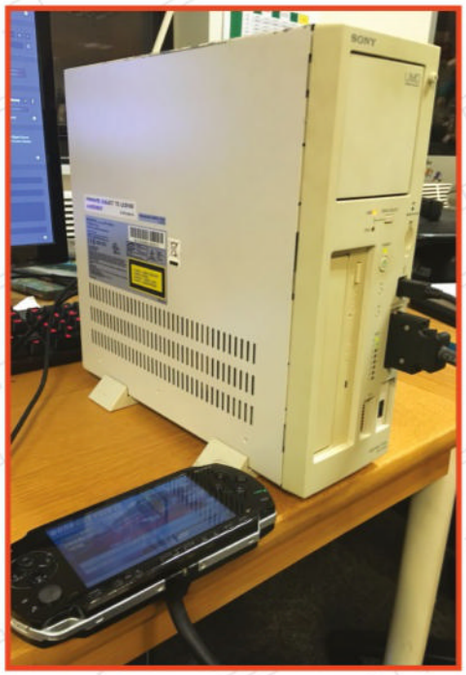
IN 2004, SONY ENTERED THE HANDHELD MARKET WITH A SYSTEM THAT PROMISED HOME-CONSOLE QUALITY GAMES ON THE GO AND MULTIMEDIA FUNCTIONS THAT WOULD MAKE IT "THE WALKMAN OF THE 21ST CENTURY". TWENTY YEARS ON, WE REVISIT THE PSP – A PORTABLE POWERHOUSE WITH A COMPLICATED LEGACY

## WORDS BY NICK THORPE

**When the tenth anniversary of the PlayStation rolled around on 3 December 2004, Sony was on top of the world.** Its original machine had transformed the business, and the PlayStation 2 had only extended its market dominance. What's more, the company was just days away from launching the PlayStation Portable, its first foray into the handheld console market – a field that had been dominated by Nintendo and its Game Boy family of consoles since 1989. Of course, Nintendo had seen off no shortage of pretenders to the throne over the prior 15 years, but Sony had already overthrown market leaders once and nobody with an ounce of sense was willing to downplay the potential for the company to do it again.

Sony announced the PSP – better known by its initialisation than its full name, even then – at E3 2003. Ken Kutaragi promised that the PSP would inhabit "a world where all kinds of entertainment, like games, music, movies are going to be fused together", pitching it as "the Walkman of the 21st century". The only piece of physical hardware shown was a prototype of the system's proprietary storage media, the Universal Media Disc – a 60mm dual-layer optical disc contained in a plastic housing, offering a high storage capacity of 1.8GB. A concept image of the console itself later surfaced in November 2003 – a sleek, stylish black device with a look relatively similar to the final design, albeit with a totally flat d-pad and buttons and no apparent analogue input or shoulder buttons.

The PSP was officially unveiled at E3 2004, and it promised to do everything. As well as playing games, it would be your MP3 player and a machine to watch movies on, with prototype camera and keyboard accessories suggesting yet more functionality. The praise from the press was effusive. *Edge* described the machine as "an instant design classic some are already ranking alongside Apple's iPod" and highlighted its impressive LCD display, quoting an attendee as saying, "You can see the screen from the other side of the fucking hall." The games on show, including *Ridge Racer*, *World Rally Championship* and *Dynasty Warriors* "looked almost comparable, graphically, to their PS2 counterparts". The magazine concluded that the real impact of the new hardware was "suddenly making



» Here's a PSP debug unit, resembling a smaller tower PC which offers DVD as well as UMD support.

## INTERVIEWEES

**Rachid El Guerrab**
■ CEO, Haiba Labs

**Chris Bourassa**
■ Cofounder, Red Hook Studios

**Paul Hughes**
■ Head of technology, Ripstone

**Leon Hurley**
■ Guides coordinator, GamesRadar

**Steve Lycett**
■ Development director, Sumo Digital

**Jeb Mayers**
■ Ex-head of R&D, Awesome Studios

**Phil Rankin**
■ Technical director, Sumo Digital

**Tyler Sigman**
■ Cofounder, Red Hook Studios

» Here's the very first image of a PSP concept design, looking a little different from its final form.

» Japanese players flocked to stores like Yodobashi Camera on launch day, quickly buying all available stock.

# UNMITIGATED MOVIE DISASTER?

## THE WEIRD HISTORY OF THE PSP'S MOVIES ON THE MOVE

The ability to watch DVDs on the PS2 was a key part of that console's massive success, so Sony desired to make films a central pillar of its strategy to turn the PSP into the "Walkman of the 21st century". However, where the PS2 had latched onto an emerging industry standard, Sony's plan with the PSP was to sell film and TV content on its proprietary Universal Media Disc format. Oddly, video was encoded using the H.264 format at 720x480 – far higher than the 480x272 resolution of the PSP's LCD display. Special features seen in DVD releases were rarely included due to UMD's smaller capacity of 1.8 GB.

The early push for the format was very aggressive – Sony gave away a million UMD copies of *Spider-Man 2* in early system bundles, and non-gaming releases initially outnumbered games. By June 2005, Sony Pictures proudly reported that *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* and *House Of Flying Daggers* had both achieved 100,000 sales in the US, within only a couple of months. In the UK, new films were generally priced at around £20 at launch. Eurogamer reported that 100,000 UMD movies had been sold by the end of the console's launch month in September 2005, to almost 250,000 PSP owners. Underworld was the most popular title with 7,487 sales, followed by *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and *xXx: The Next Level*.

However, by March 2006 The Hollywood Reporter indicated a bleak future for UMD movies – major retailers such as Walmart were cutting shelf space and companies such as Universal and Paramount had dropped the format. Benjamin Feingold of Sony Pictures cited the inability to play UMD movies back on TV as a drawback, and also commented, "I think a lot of people are ripping content and sticking it onto the device rather than purchasing," in reference to the ability to play video from the Memory Stick.

Despite those setbacks, Sony persisted with the format. In 2008, Sony Computer Entertainment America's John Koller told *Video Business* that, "The biggest issue with UMD was the lack of creating for a targeted demo," and explained that the company was now narrowly targeting a young male demographic and reducing the price of new releases to $10-15. Sony would also license titles from other publishers and handle all of the manufacturing, distribution and marketing itself. By this point, comedy films *Wedding Crashers* and *Superbad* were cited as the format's best-selling films.

You may be surprised to know that over 1,700 movie titles were released on UMD during the format's short life. They're a rather diverse bunch, from contemporary blockbuster movies like Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* trilogy to Eighties favourites like *RoboCop* and *The Terminator*. More surprisingly, you'll also find stand-up comedy from Peter Kay and Lee Evans and live music from Judas Priest and Depeche Mode. Adult releases were also available, the vast majority of them coming from the Japanese market. If you're a collector, it's a scene worth investigating as some UMD movies are now rather rare.

» British fans dive on the stock at HMV's launch event, part of a record-breaking launch day.

» The Go!Cam may have let PSP owners take selfies, but smartphones would quickly corner that market.

portable gaming a viable proposition to those who've previously dismissed it".

Nintendo officially revealed the PSP's primary competitor, the DS, at E3 2004. The differences in approach became clear immediately, as Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime told attendees, "While others plan to let you go a little faster down the same roads you have always travelled, Nintendo plans to take you down incredible avenues you've never seen before." To that end, Nintendo's machine offered a variety of quirky features. Tyler Sigman, who worked on both DS and PSP projects at Backbone Vancouver, remembers it well. "It was a really interesting time, because there was so much experimentation going on. DS had the novelty factor of the two screens and the touch and all that, but then PSP was this slick, higher-performance console."

**Chris Bourassa, who cofounded Red Hook Studios with Tyler after they had worked together at Backbone Vancouver, remembers just how exciting the PSP's raw power was to developers as well as players.** "I came off the N-Gage, so I was like, we're in the big leagues now. I loved the PSP, because we could do so much more stuff." It wasn't just the processing power that was tantalising, either. "The first time we got our hands on the PSP kits, we were immediately impressed by the size of the screen, the resolution, and the vibrant colours. It was a big step above the current handheld consoles (mainly the Game Boy Advance at the time)," says Rachid El Guerrab, then a lead programmer at Ready At Dawn. "The joysticks and controls brought it closer to the PlayStation DualShock, expanding the kinds of games we could imagine on the console. It represented a major advancement in mobile gaming, building on Sony's legacy of innovation since the PlayStation."

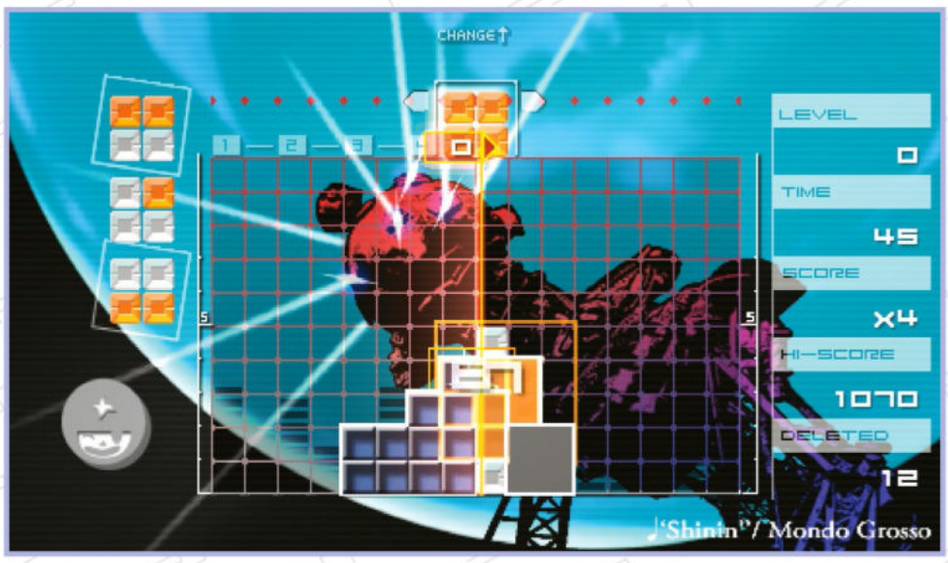
Those bold claims about the PSP approaching PS2 quality, though – surely they were somewhat hyperbolic? Phil Rankin of Sumo Digital was working on *Virtua Tennis: World Tour* at the time, which "ended up being a hybrid of the Dreamcast and PS2 versions of the game, with a number of unique features developed by us to add that unique

'Sumo Twist'", a situation necessitated by incomplete source archives. Steve Lycett, also of Sumo Digital, expands on the relationship between the systems. "For *OutRun 2006* we effectively had three sets of assets, one for Xbox, a reduced one for PS2, then a further reduced one for PSP," he recalls. "The screen size helped as fine detail got lost anyway and so we could afford to halve texture sizes. We also typically targeted 30fps too, and whilst the screen was much better than historic ones, you still had a slight motion blur and that helped smooth things out. We took a similar tack with the port of *TOCA 2*. In terms of CPU usage though we ran the core simulation at the same speed as PS2, so it had plenty of 'torque', you just needed to be careful graphically."

All that power had to come with a caveat, surely? *Edge* noted that, "The only aspects to temper E3's atmosphere of PSP excitement was talk of battery life and price," and the former had certainly seen previous powerful handhelds fail. An increasingly nervous Nintendo even used this as an attack line as the launch of the PSP drew closer – *games™* reported that at a DS press event in November 2004, Reggie told those in attendance, "Those women at the Tokyo Game Show with those portable consoles strapped to them? What you didn't see is that those women were having to go recharge the batteries every two hours. Nowhere will you find any mention of the… machine's power life. And you have to wonder why."

**As it happened, the PSP's 1800 mAh battery proved adequate – but only because of careful development practices.** For a start, Sony restricted the CPU to two-thirds of its full speed for the first few years of the console's life. "On *OutRun 2006*, we'd politely asked if we could increase the CPU clock to hold a steady 30fps, but Sony declined on the ground of battery life," says Steve. The UMD drive was also a serious constraint on battery life, as Paul Hughes remembers from his work on the *Lego* games at Traveller's Tales. "As the levels were coming off UMD we had to be clever about the disc layout in order to keep UMD seeks as infrequent as possible, as you wanted to reduce the times you span up and down the disc," he tells us. "You needed to be pulling in as much data in one burst as was possible – you did this because spinning up the UMD drive put a drain on the battery and the longer the game could play on one charge, the better."

That wasn't the only way in which the UMD proved to be a source of pain, as Steve remembers from the development of *Virtua Tennis: World Tour*. "One problem that we discovered late was how *slow* the UMD drive was," he explains. "Through development the game loaded from internal memory and the UMD emulation didn't arrive until quite late. So it went from rapid loading before that to sloooow loading overnight. We spent a chunk of time speeding that up as best as we could. You could get test pressings on UMD, but these took time and due to the launch title pressure, I think we only did a couple." Some early games really struggled with this, most infamously *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2006*, which could




» [PSP] *Lumines* was one of the first true classic games for the PSP, arriving in time for the Japanese launch.

» [PSP] Sumo Digital's *Virtua Tennis: World Tour* was an excellent expanded port of *Virtua Tennis 2*

» [PSP] Some of the big names in 2009 failed to deliver – *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines* was somewhat limp.

» [PSP] *WipEout Pure* was a fantastic game, and the proving ground for the PSP's downloadable content support.

» [PSP] BigBig Studios was a key developer, delivering the *Pursuit Force* games and *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge*.

take almost two minutes just to load a wrestler's ring-entrance scene.

Despite the development challenges, the software looked like it would deliver on the potential of the hardware. "I was still getting my head around writing for an actual magazine people were buying, so everything was exciting. I do remember going to a press event for the PSP launch and walking into a room full of branded standees which at the time felt like my first real behind-the-scenes moment for the industry," says Leon Hurley, who was just getting accustomed to his new job, writing for *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* as the console arrived. "When you saw games running on the PSP for the first time they didn't have so much of a stripped back, handheld compromise feel to them."

The PSP first arrived in Japan on 11 December 2004, and was greeted with great enthusiasm. Over 200,000 consoles were sold on that day alone – a figure slightly behind the 230,000 the DS achieved there, in part because Sony was constrained by supply issues. That enthusiasm was matched globally. In the USA, 600,000 PSPs were sold in the week after its launch on 24 March 2005, which left plenty of stock from the initial shipment of a million but was a little ahead of the Nintendo DS launch week figures of 500,000 four months earlier. Europe finally got the console on 1 September 2005, and the wait only seemed to make players more excited – 185,000 PSP consoles were sold in the UK alone on launch day, more than doubling the day one figure of 87,000 achieved by the DS and setting a record that would stand until the PlayStation 4 launched in 2013.

**Great PSP games were present from day one.** *Ridge Racer* was a potent demonstration of the console's graphical capabilities, while games like *Everybody's Golf* were perfectly suited to portable play. "Being able to play games such as *WipEout* alongside more traditional handheld titles, albeit very polished ones, like *Lumines* was a game changer," says Phil. "Previously handheld consoles always felt they came with limitations; monochrome screens, low resolutions, limited controls etc. The PSP was one of the first machines that had the hardware to allow you to play 'proper console games' on the go." Other highlights of the early years include *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*, *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*, *Pursuit Force* and *LocoRoco*. The PSP was also a great console for fans of classic games, playing host to a variety of fantastic retro compilations – and for all of the memes generated by the reveal of *Ridge Racer* at E3 2006, the addition of PlayStation games for download was great too.

Sony needed big name games on the console, but with the likes of Naughty Dog and Santa Monica Studio busy with other projects, it turned to Ready At Dawn to deliver. "Ready At Dawn treated the PSP as a first-class gaming machine rather than a handheld device, aiming to create big console games," says Rachid El Guerrab, who worked there as lead programmer on *Daxter* and lead engine programmer on *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus*. "The team of veteran artists and programmers took the challenge seriously, producing full-scale extensions of successful franchises like *Daxter* and *God Of War* with high production values across story, design, art, sound design, music and engineering," he continues. "The one I probably remember being the most impressed by was weirdly *Daxter*," says Leon. "Developer Ready At Dawn were obviously better known for whatever wizardry they pulled off with the two PSP *God Of War* games, but *Daxter* had a creativity that used the PSP really well."

It wasn't just Sony that was working with external studios to create bespoke PSP games, and those projects afforded developers precious opportunities to work on major franchises. "Sega was looking for a studio, and there was a request for proposals, so we put together a design for this game called *Sonic Lightning*, and they ended up choosing [Backbone Vancouver]," recalls Tyler, lead designer of what became *Sonic Rivals*. "That was all done on our own, without actually interfacing with Sonic Team, but once they chose us they quickly let us know that that's not the game they wanted us to make." The game Sega wanted was a 2.5D platform game with a strong racing element.

"We got some really cool, really interesting little sketches from them about how they think about how Sonic moves and how he should interact, and that stuff was really

## HANDHELD HISTORY LESSON

### THE PSP WAS GREAT FOR FANS OF RETRO COMPILATIONS – HERE ARE OUR FAVOURITES

#### ACTIVISION HITS REMIXED

The world's first third-party videogame publisher was behind plenty of the best Atari 2600 games, and this compilation includes 44 games from that era, plus some Eighties hit singles. Highlights include *Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns*, *River Raid*, *Enduro*, *Kaboom*, *Keystone Kapers*, *HERO* and Imagic's *Demon Attack*.

#### CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION RELOADED

Arcade aficionados will be right at home with this compilation, which is packed with 19 games including *1942*, *Commando*, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and three versions of *Street Fighter II*. Lesser-known games like *Knights Of The Round* and *Eco Fighters* are also worthwhile.

#### EA REPLAY

It's a shame that EA rarely pays much attention to the retro scene, as this compilation was a welcome surprise. There's plenty of variety on offer, with 16 games including *NHL 95*, *Desert Strike*, the *Road Rash* trilogy, *Syndicate*, *Ultima VII: The Black Gate*, *Wing Commander* and *Haunting Starring Polterguy*.

#### GRADIUS COLLECTION

We really like this one not only because we're shoot-'em-up nerds, but because it brought the previously Japan-only *Gradius Gaiden* to the world at large alongside the first four arcade games. There are a few other really good single-series collections on PSP too, such as *Metal Slug Anthology*.

#### NAMCO MUSEUM BATTLE COLLECTION

You may have played the likes of *Pac-Man*, *Dig Dug* and *Galaxian* to death, but this collection freshens things up a bit with the addition of four updated Arrange versions of games. It's not the only PSP compilation to do this, as *Taito Legends Powered Up* pulls off a similar trick.

# THE MINI MAKING OF ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY

## JEB MAYERS TALKS US THROUGH THE CREATION OF THE PORTABLE PUZZLER

» Archer (left) and Jeb visit Sony headquarters in Japan, during the development of *Mercury*.

» Here's a photo from 9 July 2004, when *Mercury* became the first fully working PSP game outside of Japan.

### HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK ON A PSP LAUNCH GAME?

I joined Awesome Studios in April 2003 as head of research and development. This was the first time I had met Archer Maclean. Archer was a hugely charismatic person, very passionate about everything he did, particularly his new ideas. They had a demo of a new game idea working on PC which was described as a 'ball in a maze' style puzzle – essentially it used some of the ball physics from the snooker games, grouped them together into a shiny metallic looking blob like the metal mercury. My job was to convert this to the PS2.

In May 2003, at that year's E3, Sony announced their plans for a new portable machine, the PSP. Archer being Archer was on to this like a shot – the idea of the *Mercury* running on a handheld device exactly like the old physical 'ball in a maze' puzzles was a perfect fit in his eyes. The other thing that Archer had been keen on was a tilt sensor which would allow you to actually control the device by moving it – I actually built prototypes of the tilt sensors for both PS2 and PSP, but alas this idea never made it to market.

### WHAT SUPPORT DID YOU RECEIVE FROM SONY?

We became official PSP developers in November 2003 – we were probably later to the party than some, but earlier than the majority of developers. All of the early work was done on the software PSP emulator written by Sony, which ran on a PC. Despite the robustness of the emulator, it was slow compared to the final hardware – particularly with regards to graphics, so for some developers it was a problem. The first hardware arrived at Sony Computer Entertainment Europe late June/early July 2004. It was fragile – two kits had been sent out to America and two to Europe. Three of them were DOA, so SCEE ended up with the only working development kit outside of Japan!

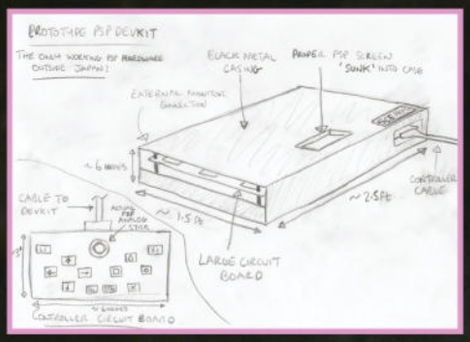
The developers who were most advanced or favoured were invited to come in to the SCEE offices and use the hardware in day-long sessions. The hardware proved to be tricky and was only half the clock speed of the final PSP. We were reliably told that the team that had the first slot on Monday had got nowhere. By the end of our first visit on 6 July, we had the dev *Mercury* frontend working. At this point we couldn't quite get into game, but we managed to get that sorted very early on in our subsequent visit on the Friday. *Mercury* was officially the first title that was fully working on the PSP hardware outside Japan! It was an incredibly proud moment for the team.

So back to the original question – how much help did we get from Sony? The answer is lots. But this was also a two-way thing, particularly around the time that the hardware became available, we were feeding back as much to Sony as they were to us. Sony would also turn to *Mercury* for all their tech demos for publishers, at internal events etc. It was a really special time for everyone at Awesome, and a first for me.

### WHAT HELPED *MERCURY* STAND OUT FROM OTHER GAMES IN THE ORIGINAL LAUNCH LINE-UP?

It was a great game, it had a lot of levels, the music was fantastic, it looked great even though it was simplistic. As for standing out from the other launch titles? I am not sure that it did. Unfortunately, one of the other launch titles was *Lumines* – which was a fantastic game and had that *Tetris*-style pick-up-and-play addictive element to it. For a lot of people there they didn't entertain the idea of buying two puzzle-style games for their shiny new PSP so they chose *Lumines*.

If I had to answer the question I would say the one thing that *Mercury* did have going for it is that it was original. It wasn't another *Ridge Racer*, it wasn't another *Tetris*-style clone, or a fighting game, or *WipEout* etc. All of those games were great and I loved them of course, but *Mercury* was genuinely something new.




» Jeb says the PSP prototype dev kit "looked ridiculous considering the final form was supposed to be handheld".

» [PSP] The final version of *Mercury* never came to PS2, but its sequel eventually did.

# HOME COMFORTS

## HOW THE PSP BECAME A LIFELINE FOR THE PS2

Having an overwhelmingly successful console isn't usually considered to be a problem, but by the end of 2006, the PS2 had Sony in a bit of a bind. Despite the ageing system being past its sales peak, new customers were still adding to the total of over 100 million PS2 consoles in homes worldwide. While some of them would naturally have moved on to other systems, it was obvious that Sony would be leaving money on the table if it failed to cater to the many players still enjoying the system. The only problem was that the PSP and the newly launched PS3 needed the software support more.

Sony's solution to the problem would be to maintain the presence of its major first-party series on the PS2 by porting them over from the PSP. Games including *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror*, *WipEout Pulse*, *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters* and *Lemmings* made their way to the older home console, usually after a delay of between six months and a year and a half. By 2009, the delays had been reduced considerably – *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge* was on the PS2 within weeks, and *Jak & Daxter: The Lost Frontier* launched simultaneously on both platforms.

Of course, third parties also got in on the action. In fact, Rockstar's PS2 release of *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* in June 2006 may well have set the template for others to follow, as the port sold over a million copies in the USA alone. As well as that game's sequel, *GTA: Vice City Stories*, other notable PSP to PS2 ports include *Silent Hill: Origins*, *Lumines Plus* and *Tokobot Plus: Mysteries Of The Karakuri*. It's worth noting that the PSP versions are typically cheaper, but the PS2 versions may have their own quirks – for example, *WipEout Pulse* on PS2 includes all the PSP DLC but also some major bugs.

» [PS2] Some games, like the *Syphon Filter* ports, really benefited from a second analogue stick.

» [PS2] The graphical disparity between the handheld and home hardware was more apparent on large displays.

helpful. I think probably the coolest thing was to just get a glimpse into their workflow, because it felt a little bit closer to their creative wellspring," recalls Chris, the game's lead artist. However, the collaborative process wasn't always straightforward. "We did a lot of research into *Sonic* games and recorded footage of how they were laid out and how often certain features in a level would pop off," Chris continues. "So we put a loop in, put some rings in there, and just make sure it feels good to run through that. And then we were told that not only should we not have rings in loops, but *Sonic* had never had rings in loops, in fact," says Tyler, picking up the story. "I think the relationship was generally pretty positive. It was definitely just a learning experience," Chris concludes.

**While the games were good, Sony made some notable blunders when it came to marketing the PSP.** The laughably inauthentic "All I Want For Xmas Is A PSP" marketing campaign ended in embarrassment, while a Dutch advert for the new white PSP resulted in accusations of racism. That wasn't the only headache for Sony, as bugs in commercially released games – including the enormously popular *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* – could be exploited to install hacked system software. The emulation scene on the console consequently flourished, as did piracy of PSP games. "I did jailbreak my PSP very early on. I was running a SNES emulator and *Doom* natively and some other stuff," Leon remembers. "Being able to run additional things on it was one of the system's greatest strengths while it was still possible. I get why Sony had to stop it but it did feel like losing one of the console's best features when it was gone."

It wasn't just the modding community unlocking the machine's potential, though. Sony eventually relented on the issue of CPU speed and the first game to use the system at full power was *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* in 2008. "For *God Of War*, our goal was to push the experience to a higher level, with improved graphics fidelity, larger levels, more NPCs, and complex interactions," says Rachid. "Even with our experience with *Daxter*, achieving the desired quality at 30fps would not have been possible without utilising the full processor speed. If I remember correctly, our framerate would've been [roughly] 22fps without."

Despite starting strongly around the world, the PSP's fortunes eventually diverged along regional lines – the picture was rosy in Japan, where the *Monster Hunter* games had become monster hits, but GfK-ChartTrack's figures for the UK market showed that the PSP accounted for just 3.6% of game sales in January 2009. "Honestly, I think Sony took the eye off the ball with PSP – and in my opinion there was one reason for this – PS3," says Jeb Mayers, then of Awesome Studios. "PS3 development was internally in dire straits by this point, and Sony were already playing catch-up with where they wanted to be. I could go into this a lot more, but suffice to say that after the successful launch of PSP all their attention then went into the PS3 and going on the offence/defence against Microsoft."

Recognising this, Sony pledged to revitalise the PSP's international fortunes in 2009. The platform holder announced a range of high-profile first-party games, including *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge*, *Resistance: Retribution*, *LittleBigPlanet* and *Gran Turismo*, with third-party support including *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines*, *Rock Band Unplugged*, *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* and *Tekken 6*. Keen-eyed readers will note that many of those names are more

» [PSP] *LocoRoco*'s distinctive art style and simple gameplay were a perfect fit for the handheld.

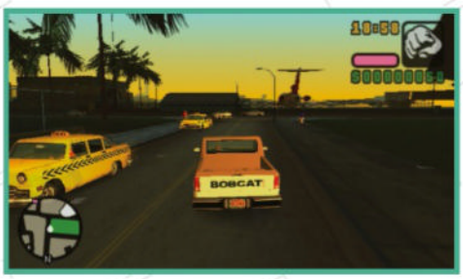
» [PSP] Namco really mastered the PSP hardware with games like SoulCalibur: Broken Destiny.

» [PSP] *Monster Hunter* games boosted Japanese PSP hardware sales as much as 400% upon their release.

associated with the PS3 than the PS2, and the shift away from the older format did impact development. "At one point, after *Lego Batman*, we had to switch engines as the console engine had evolved to the point that it was too heavyweight for the handheld, so we switched to using the lightweight engine we used for the DS and amped it up for the PSP," Paul recalls. "It's easier to scale up than scale down."

**A new range of smaller, low-cost downloadable games called Minis was also announced, and the cost of development hardware was slashed by 80% to attract developers to create them.** This brought some great games to the platform over the years, including *Velocity*, *Canabalt* and *Pinball Fantasies*. These were inspired by the success of low-cost iPhone apps, and intended to support a new piece of hardware: the PSP Go. The new machine had an attractive form factor and 16GB of internal storage, but was also completely incompatible with existing memory cards, peripherals and even games, since it lacked a UMD drive. Dutch retailer Nedgame refused to stock the machine, citing its high price and the disadvantages of the download-only software model. Don McCabe, managing director of retail chain Chips, told GamesIndustry.biz that he was "99.9% sure it's going to fail miserably", and was ultimately proven right when the console was discontinued 18 months later.

In 2010, Sony failed to keep up its renewed international push. Popular games were reissued through a new £9.99 Essentials range, but high-profile new games were thin on the ground, with *God Of War: Ghost Of*




» [PSP] Considering the limitations of UMD, games like *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* are even more impressive.

» [PSP] People complain about PS2 ports, but it'd be churlish to moan about a second chance at *Gitaroo Man*.

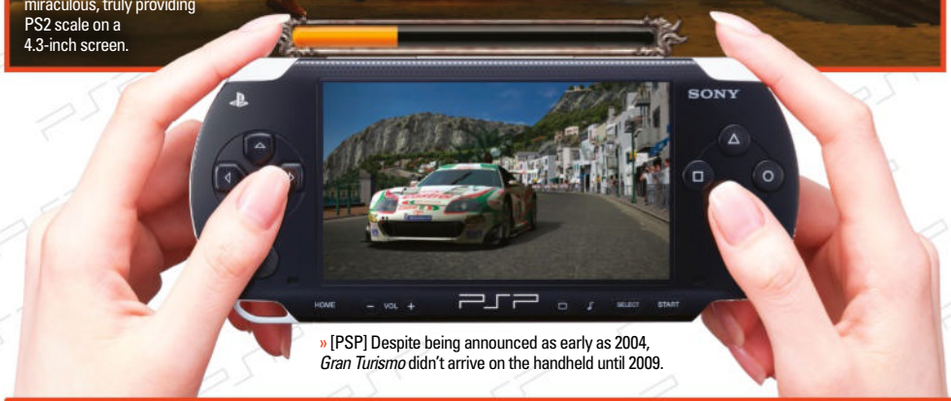
» [PSP] Backbone Vancouver provided the first look at 2.5D *Sonic* gameplay, which became increasingly common later on.

» [PSP] The *Patapon* series is one of the PSP's most distinctive and memorable first-party efforts.

» [PSP] Early *Lego* games drew on their PS2 counterparts, while later ones built on the DS versions.

» [PSP] Sumo Digital's port of *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* is rather miraculous, especially if your PSP is clocked.

» [PSP] The *God Of War* games were almost miraculous, truly providing PS2 scale on a 4.3-inch screen.




» [PSP] Despite being announced as early as 2004, *Gran Turismo* didn't arrive on the handheld until 2009.

*Sparta*, *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* and *Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep* representing the cream of the crop. By the end of the year Bob McKenzie, GameStop's senior vice president of merchandising and marketing, told Eurogamer, "If I were to pick a disappointment, the only thing would be looking at the number of titles that have launched on the PSP format compared to the prior year. I think Sony did a great job two years ago in terms of coming out with a pretty good line-up of PSP offerings and I didn't see that breadth of titles this year. And it's still pretty meaningful to consumers."

**It wasn't just retailers that were unhappy with the handling of the PSP by this point, as developers became increasingly vocal in their displeasure with the piracy situation on the console.** Dylan Cuthbert of Q-Games had taken to Twitter in 2009, saying, "I don't think we'll port anything else to the PSP, we have to see how [*PixelJunk Monsters Deluxe*] does as there's a lot of piracy. It was a shock to login to a PJMD chat room and hear them talking about how they were all playing ripped versions." In 2010, Ready At Dawn's creative director Ru Weerasuriya told VG247, "It's getting to the point where it doesn't make sense to make games on [the PSP], if the piracy keeps on increasing." It was a tough message to hear from a developer that had achieved great things with the console.

The story was different in Japan, of course, where the release schedule was healthy and the system was buoyed by hits like *God Eater*. Through 2010 and into 2011, PSP fans elsewhere saw their hopes dashed as localised versions of exclusive games like *Final Fantasy: Type-0* and the *Yakuza* spin-off *Kurohyou: Ryu*

# SONY'S NEXT TOP MODEL

## THERE ARE FIVE DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE PSP OUT THERE – WHICH ONE IS BEST TODAY?

### PSP (PSP-1000)

**2004**

The PSP's first iteration is perfectly serviceable, but has a slightly mushy d-pad, and the square button feels rather odd as it has a cut-out that's necessary to accommodate the LCD screen. Its low system RAM means it can't use the UMD cache mode of other models, slowing game loading.

### PSP SLIM (PSP-2000)

**2007**

This second model is one fifth thinner and one third lighter than its predecessor. The controls are improved, the LCD display is brighter, you can output to a TV and charging via USB cable is possible. For most people, this is the best model of the console to seek out.

### PSP SLIM & LITE (PSP-3000)

**2008**

This one's a bit of a mixed bag – the LCD display has a wider colour range and greater contrast, as well as reduced ghosting thanks to a faster pixel response time. However, interlacing has been introduced, compromising motion clarity. It does support interlaced TV output, if you need it.

» In 2010, Nielsen reported that 52% of US PSP owners were female, ahead of the Wii's 49%.

» [PSP] The presence of games like *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* really hammered home the PlayStation identity.

» [PSP] *Danganronpa* began life on the PSP, but failed to leave Japan on its original format.

*Ga Gotoku Shinshou* failed to materialise. It felt like the console had more or less been abandoned as work proceeded on its successor, the PlayStation Vita – to the point that it was a surprise when Sony announced the new budget PSP Street model at Gamescom in the summer of 2011. The Vita would launch in December of that year, and ended up as the international destination for Japanese PSP favourites like *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc*. Though it lacked a UMD drive, the Vita was compatible with digital PSP games and downloadable releases continued until the release of *Retro City Rampage DX* in 2016.

**Reporting on Sony's decision to cease shipping PSP consoles in 2014, MCV noted that, "PSP spent much of its life being maligned as a failure," based on the greater success of the DS – and like us, it considered that an "unfair assessment".** But the trade magazine still felt that "its legacy for many will be one of failure", citing the decision to use UMDs, the push to sell movies on them and the disastrous PSP Go experiment. "All in all its biggest failure was perhaps its lack of killer IP," the magazine concluded. "How many truly memorable PSP exclusive titles can you recall?" Sony had come to similar conclusions beforehand – in 2012, company representative John Koller told Gamasutra, "The issue that happened with PSP is we got overrun with ports, it became very difficult for us to define what made PSP unique."

"In retrospect I think that the PSP's power actually counted against it in the end. All the big publishers tended to just take the cheapest route to making games for it – cut down PS2 titles with slightly worse controls. It meant the overall library didn't have much of a draw, despite some real stand-out classics which were always PSP-specific games," Leon reflects. "It didn't help either that anything that did sell well got ported back to PS2 in the end – the *GTA* games for example. It meant that while the hardware was good and had all the potential to be a great console the library lacked any real weight." Despite that, the PSP remains memorable for those who embraced it, as Rachid tells us. "Before playing any games, the PSP was my first high-quality portable video player, superior to the DVD players that were popular at the time. I used it to watch the first videos of my newborn daughter in early 2005 and bought movies for overseas trips. I also enjoyed games like *LocoRoco*, *Echochrome* and *Virtua Tennis*, along with classics like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Lumines*."

Sony shifted about 80 million PSP consoles – an impressive total, but Nintendo was able to broaden the market's demographics with games like *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training* and *Nintendogs*, and sold 154 million Nintendo DS consoles as a result. PSP owners bought 4.33 games per console sold, compared to 6.16 on the DS. Some have suggested that the PSP was a failure based on those numbers, but the truth is that the PSP's hardware sales are comparable to those of the Game Boy Advance, and its software sales ratio falls between the Game Boy's 4.22 and the GBA's 4.63. If the PSP is a failure, it's only in comparison to an exceptional competitor and the expectations created by Sony's market-shaping prior successes.

Sony didn't come close to breaking Nintendo's dominance of the handheld market, nor did it revolutionise portable entertainment, its ambitions curtailed by the rise of the smartphone. But for all of its patchy support and some odd decisions, it did create a console that hosted plenty of memorable games, which are easy to experience today as PSP games are generally inexpensive. The PSP is due a nostalgic reappraisal and this 20th anniversary year seems like an opportune moment for it, so if you've previously missed Sony's miniature marvel, now is the perfect time to dive in.

## PSP GO (PSP-N1000)

**2009**

The sliding form factor is nice, but buying digital PSP games and loading them onto a PSP Go legitimately is now an absolute chore. It does feature decent internal storage if you wish to tinker with it, and the pricey official dock lets you play it console-style with a PS3 pad.

## PSP STREET (PSP-E1000)

**2011**

The final PSP sports cheaper matte plastics, but it handles nicely and the LCD screen is solid. It also cuts various features, and while the mono speaker and lack of TV output might not bother you, it's worth knowing that the lack of Wi-Fi means that multiplayer modes are totally inaccessible.

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# THE LEGACY OF KNIGHT LORE

**YES, RETRO GAMER DID CELEBRATE ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, BUT THAT WAS A DECADE AGO. AT ANY RATE; HERE WE ARE BACK FOR MORE, ON ULTIMATE'S FINEST, THE BRILLIANT KNIGHT LORE, A GAME THAT DAZZLED GAMERS AND DEVELOPERS ALIKE**

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

» Today, Graham Stafford is a business advisor, specialising in the technology and creative sectors. Back in the Eighties, Graham coded the 8-bit isometric gems, *NEXOR* and *Nosferatu*.

» Gremlin's Terry Lloyd. Today, he's more involved in game design and has co-created the 2D shoot-'em-up *Chaos Moon* alongside fellow Gremlin alum Chris Shrigley and musician Barry Leitch.

**Formed in 1982 by the Stamper family, Ultimate Play The Game's debut, *Jet Pac*, set the tone for the software house during the second half of the following year, cementing its place as the premier ZX Spectrum game developer.** Just have a look at these games, all released within a seven-month period: *Jet Pac*, *Cookie*, *Pssst*, *Tranz Am*, *Lunar Jetman* and *Atic Atac*. Full of amazing colour and charming playability, Ultimate's games were clearly streets ahead of its rivals, its reputation well deserved.

Then, the first half of 1984, a quiet time for Ultimate – or at least it appeared that way. The reality was much different at Play The Game HQ, for the Stamper brothers were busy refining their next big game. *Sabre Wulf* begins the tortuous journey of Sabreman, known at this point as simply The Explorer, and engenders several elements that would become synonymous with Ultimate. Byzantine instructions (complete with a twee poem), maze-like gameplay, a large bespoke cardboard box and a higher price point of £9.95 – all these added to the mystery of a games company that was building towards… something. Large whole-page adverts, offering intricate artwork, a name and little else, also lent Ultimate an enigmatic sheen.

Anticipation for *Sabre Wulf* was astronomical. "From the moment the first ad for *Sabre Wulf* appeared, the question we have heard most is, 'Is it out yet?'" bemoaned *Crash* magazine in its review of *Sabre Wulf*. Arriving at the magazine with seconds to spare for issue six's deadline, *Crash* declined to rate Ultimate's latest. However, the reviewers' comments left fans with no doubt about the quality of Sabreman's first adventure.

An outstanding critical and commercial hit, *Sabre Wulf* was one of the Spectrum games of 1984. But not all were totally in love with Ultimate's latest. "To my horror, [I found] that this over-priced game is merely a rewrite of *Atic Atac*," whinged one reader in a letter to *Crash*. "An unoriginal… maze game from such an experienced and loved company is just not on… what do Ultimate think they are doing?" It's easy to see this comment's significance as a barometer of how some Spectrum owners were starting to view Ultimate's games.

> "I BOUGHT A COPY – IT WAS ONE OF THE VERY FEW GAMES I ACTUALLY PURCHASED AND TRIED TO PLAY"
> MEV DINC

Fortunately for its fans, especially those jaded with the top-down maze style, the Stampers had already been beavering away on a totally new type of game, releasing it and Sabreman's second adventure, *Underwurlde*, simultaneously at the end of 1984.

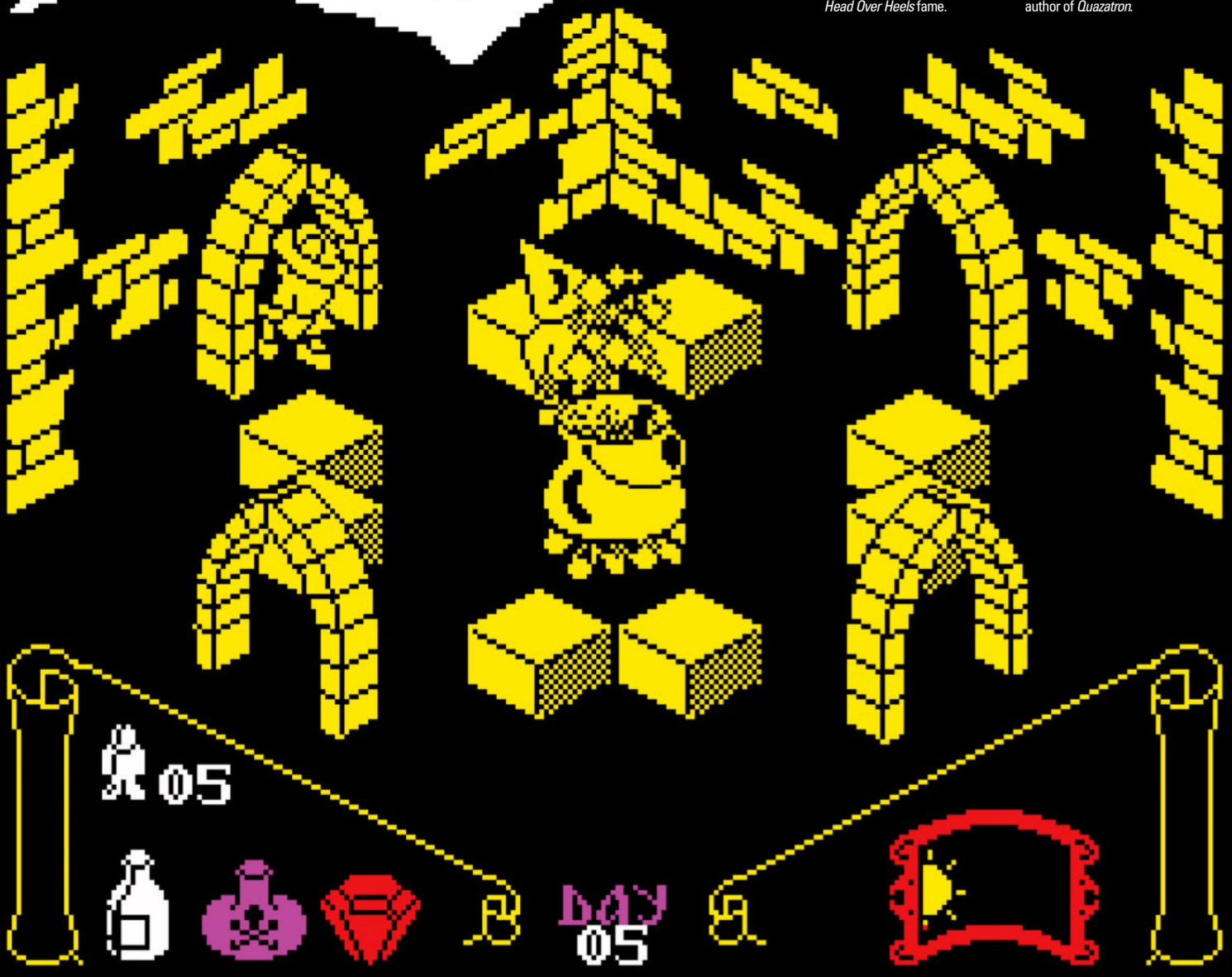
In *Knight Lore*, Sabreman's third adventure, the fearless explorer has donned his pith helmet once more as he surveys another deadly location. Having been bitten by a werewolf (or werewulf, as the game's atavistic instructions put it), Sabreman is cursed to transform into an anthropomorphic wolf upon sunset; once 40 days and nights have passed, the curse is irreversible, leaving our brave hero stricken with the lycanthropic disease for evermore.

# KNIGHT LORE

» Mev Dinc author of Electric Dreams' *Prodigy.*

» Jon Ritman, of *Batman* and *Head Over Heels* fame.

» Graftgold's Steve Turner, author of *Quazatron.*



# THE ULTIMATE GAME

WHAT MAKES ULTIMATE'S KNIGHT LORE SO SPECIAL?

### CARTOON-LIKE GRAPHICS

While it wasn't the first Spectrum game to have an isometric display, *Knight Lore*'s graphics were hugely improved with a cartoon-like sheen.

### SMOOTH ANIMATION

Sabreman pootles around the dank castle easily, objects and enemies elegantly gliding around *Knight Lore*'s many screens. Best of all is the transformation from man to wulf.

### ATMOSPHERE

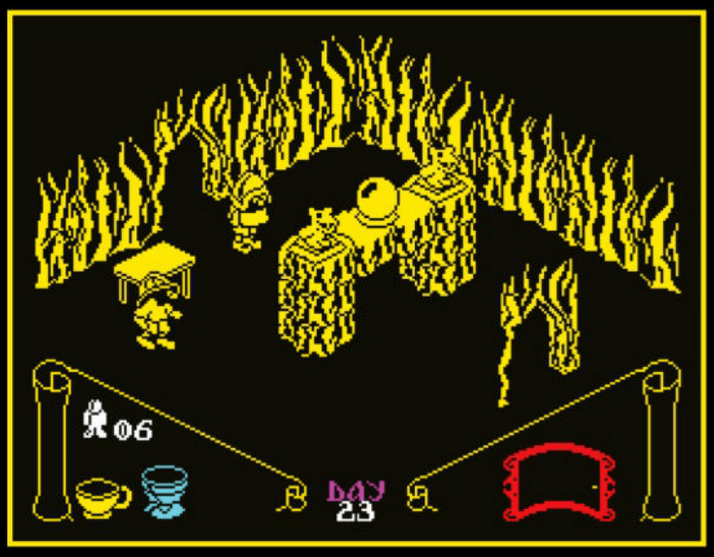
The atmosphere drips from the dark walls of the titular castle, creating a feeling of involvement that few other games of the era evoked.

### PUZZLES WITH UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

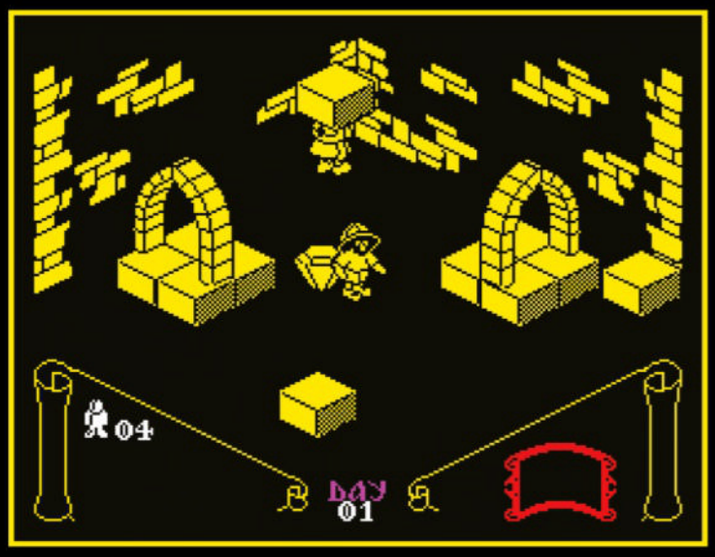
While its mainly physics-based puzzles may not be original, the isometric perspective gives *Knight Lore*'s gameplay a fresh viewpoint.

### DAY-NIGHT CYCLE

*Knight Lore*'s day-night cycle propels its gameplay, the arrival of night causing Sabreman to take on his new monstrous form.




» [ZX Spectrum] Sabreman can also explore outside the castle.




» [ZX Spectrum] Another object for Sabreman to collect, but watch out for that guard.

Fortunately, a solution is at hand. The wizard Melkhior sits inside his castle Knight Lore, commanding his minions while concocting strange brews within his giant cauldron. A powerful yet frail magician, Melkhior can free Sabreman of his affliction – should the explorer be able to bring him the ingredients for the necessary spell. Inevitably, Melkhior's domain is far from visitor-friendly. Apart from the minions mentioned above – commonly taking the form of monstrous magical creations and human guards – traps, primarily vicious spikes, contact with which spells instant doom, infest Knight Lore castle. In fact, there are all sorts of magic going on, with the castle's walls often levitating around the rooms or disintegrating upon stepping on them. Virtually every room is an intricate puzzle that needs care and skill to negotiate. The daring Sabreman has his work cut out.

**While its gameplay is at its core unoriginal – it's essentially a platform game, albeit a complex and extensive one – *Knight Lore*'s graphics, its isometric projection display, is what made it such a success initially, and a renowned game today, 40 years later.** And it wasn't just the graphics themselves: the animations, delicately and amusingly rendered, make each character, particularly Sabreman himself, pop out from the screen. "I bought a copy – it was one of the very few games I actually purchased and tried to play," says Mev Dinc, author of Electric Dreams' *Prodigy*, which used a similar style. "I was really impressed with the quality of the graphics and all the lovely animations – it may have lacked colour, but it made up for it in pixel resolution."

> "IT WAS THE FIRST GAME IN AGES THAT I TOOK AN INTEREST IN WHAT IT WAS ACTUALLY DOING TECHNICALLY"
> STEVE TURNER

The engineering under the Spectrum's hood – all within less than 48K, remember – is remarkable and was a real game-changer for computer games in general. The critical point for the Stampers was how to order *Knight Lore*'s sprites so that they'd seamlessly pass in front or behind, according to their location and objects on the screen. This overlapping uses a mask, a sprite of precisely the same size and dimensions as the original object. This mask sets the part of the background that needs to be rubbed out (overlayed) and the part that the game needs to maintain. Then, it's just a matter of dropping the actual visible sprite into the mask and repeating the process for every object on every screen. The result was a 2D game with an extra dimension, not entirely true 3D, but close enough to make *Knight Lore* an exceptional and innovative piece of software.

Everyone sat up and took notice, including many of the Stampers' programming peers, such as Mev, situated all over the UK. "[*Knight Lore*] was one of the games that one of Andrew [Braybrook's] friends brought round to the house," remembers Graftgold's Steve Turner, situated in leafy Essex. "I could see that this game was doing something different, and I was immediately thinking about how it was overlaying things in 3D, getting that depth of view where the character could go behind things. It was the first game in ages that I took an interest in what it was actually doing technically."

Fellow programmer Jon Ritman was delivering his latest game to Manchester's Ocean Software when he first encountered *Knight Lore*, months before its release. "I'd just given David Ward [Ocean's boss] the master copy of *Match Day*, and he told me to look at this game that they were distributing for Ultimate," says Jon. "I took it round to Crystal Computing, where I was going to crash for the night, as they were just a bit north of Manchester. We put it on and were just blown away – it was just, great, like a Disney film you could play." While Crystal's Simon Brattel appeared to know how *Knight Lore*'s display worked, he kept his cards well tucked in. Continues Jon, "I was going, 'How the fuck do they do that?' but Simon wouldn't bloody tell me! So I went home to work out how to do it myself." Graham Stafford, who worked at Crystal before becoming a crucial part of its successors, Design Design and Walking Circles, was also present. "Visually, nobody had seen anything like it – everyone's chins hit the ground when they saw *Knight Lore*. We all knew we'd have to up our game, and while a number of Spectrum games had used masked sprites before, and a number had done isometric perspective – *Ant Attack* being the most notable – none had combined these two ideas."

After its boom of 1983 and a large portion of 1984, the Spectrum games market had entered a creative slump as developers slowly began to expand what they could do on the Sinclair computer. Like our disappointed *Crash* letter writer, Steve Turner understood that something had to change. "I was thinking about rewriting my main type of plot routine because it was virtually the same one I'd used in my first game – I'd just been making incremental changes," he says. As great as ST Software/Graftgold's Spectrum games were, their author had realised a

## THE FILMATION STORY

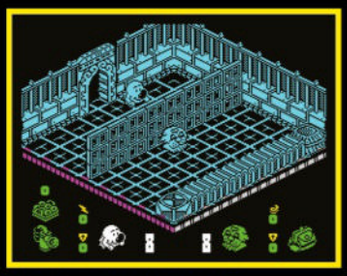
### HOW ULTIMATE REFINED ITS GROUNDBREAKING TECHNIQUE

Having produced the *Knight Lore* sequel *Pentagram*, with the sci-fi game *Alien 8* between, the Stampers began to refine their advanced Filmation engine. First up was *Nightshade*, a new adventure starring a nameless knight, charged with saving the village of *Nightshade* from four mischievous demons. While certain elements (obscure instructions, mediaeval theme) remain constant, the scrolling environment, ability to rotate the screen to view more walls and – shock – more colour make *Nightshade*'s Filmation II a considerable step up. Ultimate diversified further with its next game, *Gunfright*, including a Wild West scenario, shoot-out minigames and the highly amusing hobby horse (see screenshot below), but it was to be the final hurrah for the technology. Purportedly the final game with any direct involvement from Tim and Chris Stamper, Ultimate's next two games, *Martianoids* and *Bubbler*, use a different engine. Interestingly, the famous *Mire Mare*, the final game in the *Sabreman* series, was rumoured to be reverting back to the top-down style of his first adventure, *Sabre Wulf*. Sadly, in any form, it was not to be, at least until the 2014 unofficial fan game.

# KNIGHT LORE – WITH A TWIST

### MOVIE

■ Dusko Dimitrijevic's cool isometric gumshoe adventure *Movie* was a hit in 1986, securing several accolades in the press. With its laconic star, hands plunged in pockets and noir plot, *Movie* was already a world away from *Knight Lore*. The ability to 'speak' using comic-esque speech bubbles was another great innovation.



### HEAD OVER HEELS

■ Jon Ritman had already cut his isometric teeth with 1986's *Batman* before producing what many consider the finest Spectrum game in the genre. The twin dilemma – two switchable characters, each with its own abilities and weaknesses is the game's USP, and it's recently been brilliantly remade for the Spectrum Next.

### FAIRLIGHT

■ While it shares *Knight Lore*'s mediaeval theme, *Fairlight* introduces several RPG elements that raise it beyond the Ultimate trailblazer. Most notably, its star, Isvar, can pick up and manipulate objects, move them between rooms, and fight enemies within a realistic castle environment, complete with fully rendered walls.

### QUAZATRON

■ Having abandoned the idea of translating Andrew Braybrook's *Paradroid* directly to the Spectrum, Steve Turner conquered Filmation, tweaking the angle, creating a pyramid style initially dubbed Ziggurat and introducing scrolling. The addition of *Paradroid*'s fun minigame also adds another dimension to this fantastic game.

» Here's the excellent Spectrum version of *Knight Lore*'s box art, smartened up by ex-Ocean artist Mark Jones.

refreshing update was due. "So, I suppose the biggest thing is thinking, I'd like to get things moving behind other things."

**Having drawn his characters directly onto the screen for his games up until this point, Steve switched to using screen buffers, allowing him to develop his Ziggurat engine, with robots buzzing in front and behind each other.** By highly optimising his routines, Steve could not only replicate *Knight Lore*'s visuals but also make them more efficient. "So basically I did the scenery, that's there in the memory, and then I plotted the robots, not on top of the scenery as that would corrupt it," he explains. "I copied those to rectangles and then plotted the robots over them before moving all that lot to the screen in the right order, either from the back screen copy or from the robots' rectangles." While Steve's method differed from the Stampers', *Knight Lore* undoubtedly inspired him to develop his own solution.

» [ZX Spectrum] Dodging random fires in the hall of gargoyles.

From Essex, we travel down south to Southampton and back to Mev Dinc, who was plotting something similar. "Like *Knight Lore*, most of the existing isometric games used static flipped screens – ie, you moved around a set screen before moving to the next," he says. "There was no scrolling of the actual backgrounds – only the player character and some of the computer-controlled objects moved." Having worked on the Commodore 64 port of *Ant Attack*, Mev was familiar enough with isometric projection to develop scrolling, allowing for much larger levels. "I wanted to excel technically and be ambitious with my games. I thought I could make an isometric game but had to go one step ahead." Eventually, Mev produced *Prodigy*, a novel game where the player guides an infant named Nejo throughout the dangerous world of Wardlock, a mechanical sorcerer adept at playing God.

Meanwhile, back in Kent, Jon Ritman had already made progress with his first isometric game, *Batman*, and was now working on what many regard as not only his finest but also one of the best Spectrum games ever, *Head Over Heels*. "For me, the ultimate – no pun intended – incarnation of

## EIGHT SPECTRUM GAMES THAT TOOK ULTIMATE'S GAME AND MADE IT SOMETHING DIFFERENT

### THE GREAT ESCAPE

■ It was the turn of ace development team Denton Designs to adapt *Knight Lore*'s aesthetic in the winter of 1986, transplanting the genre into World War II. It was another isometric smash with multiple escape routes, a superb atmosphere, and novel gameplay elements – such as morale measuring failure and success.

### PRODIGY

■ This Electric Dreams game from programmer Mev Dinc and artist Gary Thornton is nonetheless another game that improved on the *Knight Lore* template. The neat scrolling is good, but it's the addition of the cute offspring, trailing the player and requiring constant upkeep, that really elevates *Prodigy*.

### WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

■ Denton Designs followed up *The Great Escape* with this extraordinary isometric adventure, spiritually based on movies such as *Lost Horizon* and *The Land That Time Forgot*. The game begins at the scene of a plane crash, and the player's role is simply to guide the survivors out of the hidden valley. Dinosaurs, cannibals and more stand in their way.

### LA ABADÍA DEL CRIMEN

■ For many Spectrum fans, this Spanish exclusive is the supreme isometric game on the Sinclair 128K computer. Nominally based on the novel, *The Name Of The Rose*, its title translates as *The Abbey Of Crime*, and it's a remarkably in-depth game, full of independent NPCs, plenty of exposition and dialogue and an evocative murder-mystery storyline.

the genre was *Head Over Heels*," proclaims Graham Stafford. "But nothing will ever take away that mind-blowing moment when you first saw *Knight Lore*." Jon's addition of an extra playable character with its own unique traits is an extension of *Knight Lore*'s own Sabreman/werewulf transformation.

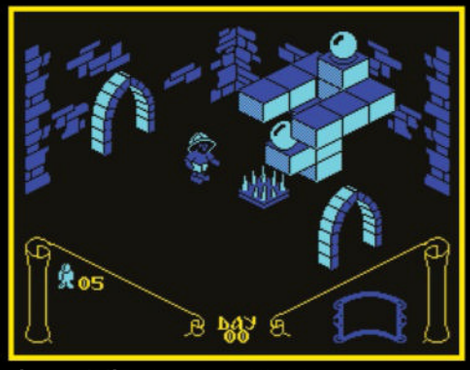
> "EVERYONE'S CHINS HIT THE GROUND WHEN THEY SAW KNIGHT LORE"
> GRAHAM STAFFORD

**As with our programming interviewees, journalists were equally effusive regarding *Knight Lore*.** *Popular Computing Weekly* was first out of the blocks, reviewing Ultimate's latest inside its 29 November issue. "*Knight Lore*, from Ultimate, is the most technically supreme game that I have ever played," gushed Gordon Sneddon, awarding the game five out of five. Two weeks later, *Knight Lore* was Smashed in *Crash*, Game Of The Month in *Personal Computer Games* and scored an incredible 99% in *Sinclair Programs*. A month after that, it was a hit with *Your Sinclair* and *Sinclair User*, the latter awarding the game nine out of ten, and its reviewer, Chris Bourne, eloquently concluding that '"the overall effect is of a crepuscular world of claustrophobic menace".

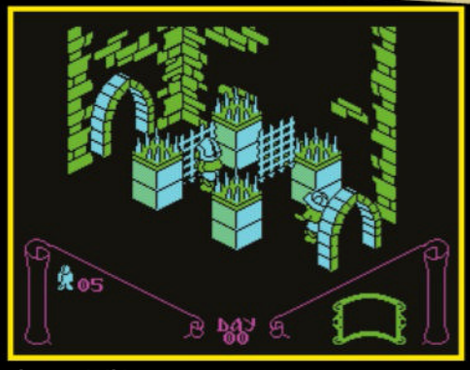
It wasn't just the press that was excited about *Knight Lore*. In 1984, industry veteran and game designer/artist Terry Lloyd worked as a sales assistant at Derby's First Byte Computers. "A lot of customers were excited about [*Knight Lore*]," he remembers. "At the time, there hadn't been many games that used the isometric technique, so it generated a lot of press and high expectations from players. Customers regularly came in requesting the game. I recall seeing the advert and box art and being impressed – we ordered many copies in to meet the eventual demand." Ultimate's attention to presentation extended to its game boxes, graduating from the single jewel cases of *Jet Pac*, *Atic Atic* et al, to the large prestige box for *Sabre Wulf* and, subsequently, *Knight Lore*. Continues Terry, "I think [Ultimate's] artwork was a major driver of sales – whoever looked at an advert for an Ultimate game and didn't want to run out and buy it?" However, with a distinctive box came that special price once more, £9.95, almost double the cost of regular Spectrum cassette games at ▶

» *Knight Lore* continued *Crash* magazine's love affair with Ultimate.

» Ultimate spoiled fans with two games for Christmas 1984.

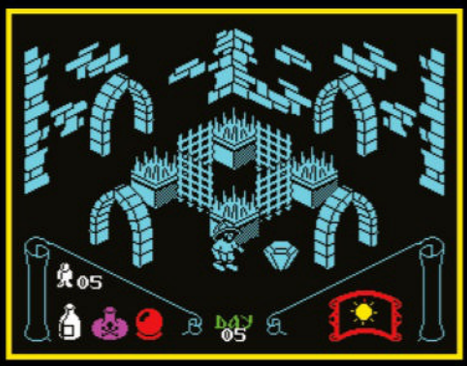


» [Amstrad CPC] The Amstrad port of *Knight Lore* introduces a touch more colour.

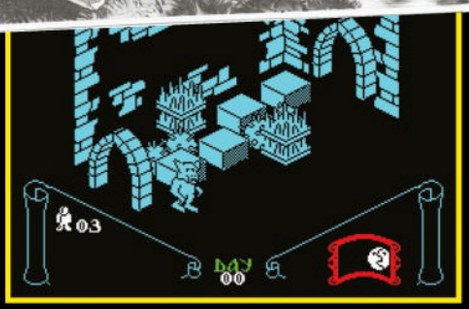


» [Amstrad CPC] Sabreman must be quick to dodge this patrolling guard.

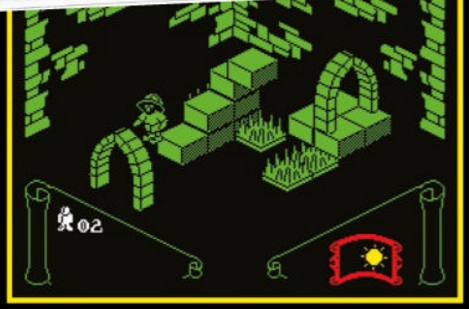
» Oli Frey's wonderful *Knight Lore* map, tidied up and scanned by ex-Ocean artist Mark Jones.




» [ZX Spectrum] It's another puzzling encounter for our hero.



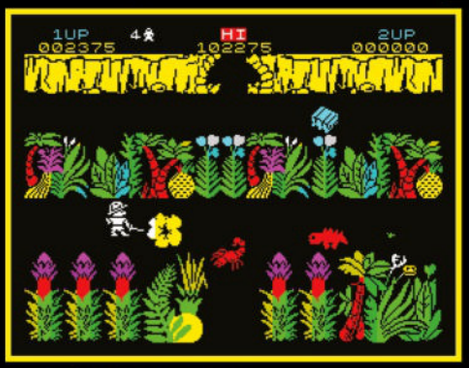

» [ZX Spectrum] This lethal room represents a challenge, even for the high-jumping werewulf.




» [ZX Spectrum] One touch from these spikes spells doom for Sabreman.

» [ZX Spectrum] This amateur Sabreman receives a withering rating. Better try harder next time.

# THE SAGA OF SABREMAN




## SABRE WULF

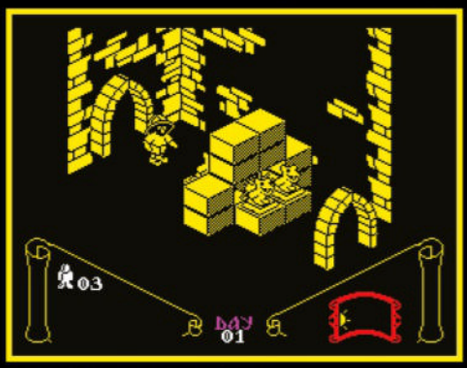
**SYSTEM:** ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64, Commodore Plus/4 **YEAR:** 1984

■ In his debut adventure, Sabreman is venturing deep within a convoluted jungle brimming with dangerous beasts and fauna. To escape, the hero must gather the four pieces of an ancient amulet hidden in the enormous maze. Only when he's assembled the amulet can Sabreman pass the guardian and enter the Underwurlde.

## UNDERWURLDE

**SYSTEM:** ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64 **YEAR:** 1984

■ Released simultaneously with the third game, *Knight Lore*, *Underwurlde* follows directly on from *Sabre Wulf*. Sabreman is stuck again, this time in the eponymous underground caverns. Three guardians, erm, guard the exits, each leading to a different ending. Defeat one of them, and Sabreman's next adventure awaits.




## KNIGHT LORE

**SYSTEM:** ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, BBC Micro, Commodore Plus/4, MSX, NES **YEAR:** 1984

■ Sabreman is in a bit of a pickle once more. An encounter with a dreaded werewulf has cursed our hero with lycanthropy; each night, he transforms into a werewulf himself. Sabreman has 40 days and nights to locate the wizard of Knight Lore castle and gather the spell ingredients to free him from the curse.

the time. "I thought that was a heavy hike for kids, who were the ones basically buying the game," muses Steve Turner. "Plus, I knew piracy was rife at that time, and I thought it was just going to make that worse. But the key was to produce a nice product, giving something physical that's nice to have in addition to the game."

**With the technology established, the Stampers themselves produced more Filmation games in a relatively swift time.** Sci-fi adventure *Alien 8* arrived four months later, while one of *Underwurlde*'s other teased games, *Pentagram*, appeared in the Spring of 1986. In between these, the Stampers refined their engine, resulting in Filmation II, creating the scrolling and multicoloured games *Nightshade* and *Gunfright*. Yet it wasn't just Ultimate that was producing isometric games. Vast swathes of similar games appeared, many adding upgraded gameplay and graphics, such as wartime drama *The Great Escape*, Bo Jangeborg's *Fairlight*, and Design Design's *NEXOR* and *Nosferatu*. "There's no doubt that seeing *Knight Lore* and working out how they'd did it made me significantly change my technical approach to writing games; it was that revolutionary, requiring a paradigm shift in programming technique," notes Graham Stafford, author of those last two games.

Eventually, inevitably, the Spectrum market, in particular, was saturated with isometric games, and both fans and critics became disenchanted with the genre. But that's not *Knight Lore*'s fault, and takes nothing away from the fact that it was the first to market, its vibrant living world of magic, lycanthropy and oversized, ominous spikes inspiring a whole generation of both developers and gamers. "To me, it showed that it could be done, you just needed someone with the technical expertise and sheer guts to push through that barrier," muses Steve. "Yes, probably someone else would have done it in the end, but it was one of those pivotal moments where a game comes out, and you can see the ripples of change and know it's never going to be the same again."

> "I RECALL SEEING THE ADVERT AND BOX ART AND BEING IMPRESSED – WE ORDERED MANY COPIES IN TO MEET THE EVENTUAL DEMAND"
> TERRY LLOYD

Steve's last point is the most salient. In terms of influence, few games, especially on the ZX Spectrum, can have been as significant as *Knight Lore*. "It looked excellent," says Terry, "with incredibly detailed visuals and pseudo-3D depth perspective, a much more immersive experience compared to most other games of the time. It paved the way for games like *Fairlight* and *Highway Encounter*." Of course, there's also an underrated aspect of *Knight Lore*: its gameplay. Here, players could manipulate objects, most famously by using them to jump higher, while Sabreman's nocturnal alter-ego can jump higher but attracts greater aggression from the castle's denizens. "*Knight Lore* forced programmers to re-evaluate and think, well, we'd better pick ourselves up and go up another notch here!" says Steve.

The years 1984 to 1987 represent a glorious era for 8-bit gaming. While the Stampers themselves were soon planning their next move, away from the ZX Spectrum and home computers, in the spring of 1987, Ultimate released its final games, *Martianoids* and *Bubbler*, to a relatively muted reception. Having sold the brand to US Gold a few months earlier, it's unlikely the Stampers themselves had any involvement in developing these games. Yet while it was an anticlimactic end to the Ultimate story, nothing can detract from its remarkable success, primarily epitomised by Sabreman's third adventure, the reluctant hero glancing nervously around as he explores the beautiful and iconic castle of *Knight Lore*.

**Our thanks to Mev Dinc, Steve Turner, Graham Stafford, Terry Lloyd and Jon Ritman for their contributions.**

## RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT THE GAMES STARRING ULTIMATE'S FAMOUS HERO

### PENTAGRAM

**SYSTEM:** ZX Spectrum, Commodore Plus/4, MSX **YEAR:** 1986

*Underwurlde*'s next exit leads Sabreman to the magical tale *Pentagram*. Having collected the final Grand Arch Wizardry spell book from the Old Mystic Curio Shoppe, Sabreman's quest is to locate the pieces of an obelisk and assemble the fabled Pentagram. Should he succeed, he will truly become a master wizard.

### MIRE MARE

**SYSTEM:** N/A **YEAR:** N/A

Teased at the end of *Underwurlde*'s third exit and at the end of both *Knight Lore* and *Pentagram*, the existence of *Mire Mare* has been hotly debated since the mid-Eighties. The game likely never existed beyond a planning stage, although it inspired the 2014 fan game *Land Of Mire Mare* by Luca Bordoni and Jarrod Bentley. For more info, check out issue 105 of **Retro Gamer**.

### SABRE WULF

**SYSTEM:** Game Boy Advance **YEAR:** 2004

Sabreman returned, this time to the Game Boy Advance, in 2004, thanks to Rare's official update/remake of its 1984 game. The Sabrewulf is loose again, and the mayor of Blackwyche has enlisted Sabreman to help the village combat the creature. Only by defeating the mysterious Dr Doolittle-Goode [Groan – Ed] can Sabreman finally rid the world of the Sabrewulf menace.

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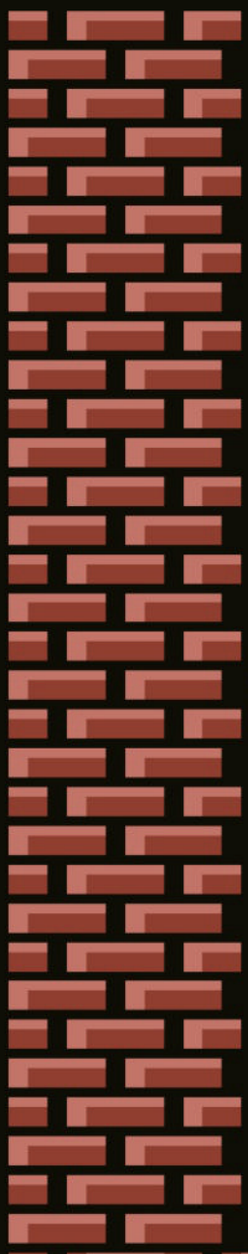
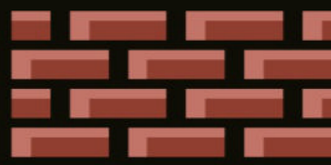
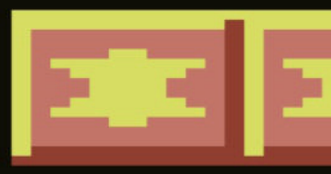






# The Great Giana Sisters

WHO NEEDS A NES?





» COMMODORE 64 » 1987
» TIME WARP PRODUCTIONS

**The NES wasn't very prolific at all where I lived and I only knew a couple of people who owned them growing up.** As a result, most of my interaction with the console initially came from playing *Super Mario Bros* in the Boscombe branch of Boots. It felt like a monumental step above the platformers I was enjoying on my Amstrad and I always looked forward to a weekend stay at my nan's house as she'd inevitably take me into town so I could play some more of the game.

A year or two later I visited a friend who owned a C64 and a huge number of games and he introduced me to *The Great Giana Sisters*, which as you'll probably know, is a pretty impressive clone of *Super Mario Bros*. I was absolutely staggered by how good it looked and how accurate it felt to the NES original and I'd find excuses to visit his house so I could play it as often as possible. It not only looked incredibly authentic (a little too authentic as history has shown us) but also *felt* authentic and while it didn't play exactly the same as the NES original it felt pretty damned close at the time.

I'd always been impressed by the efficiency and sheer grunt of the C64 because its versions of games were often far superior to the versions I had on my Amstrad, but this was on another level entirely. Outside of *Mayhem In Monsterland* it's probably the most console-like experience I've ever had on an 8-bit home computer and I've still no idea how Manfred Trenz and the rest of Time Warp Productions were able to pull it off.

While Time Warp's game soon became notorious, with magazines noting the legal issues between Nintendo and Rainbow Arts, it proved to me that there was still plenty of life in the 8-bit home micros and that the C64 really was a truly impressive computer.

# THE HISTORY OF EARTHBOUND

**KNOWN AS MOTHER IN JAPAN, THE EARTHBOUND TRILOGY HAS INSPIRED FERVENT FANDOM, COMMUNITY TRANSLATIONS AND A DOCUMENTARY FILM. A CELEBRATED PART OF NINTENDO HISTORY, THE TIMELINE OF THE SERIES HAS SOME EXTRAORDINARY TWISTS AND TURNS, JUST AS THE GAMES DO**

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

**Shigeru Miyamoto is famous for making people happy, but the Nintendo legend caused tears when the concept for *Mother* landed on his desk.** In a public discussion between the two men published on the Hobonichi website earlier this year, Mother creator Shigesato Itoi remembers welling up on a bullet train ride home after making an unsuccessful initial pitch to Miyamoto. Fortunately, Itoi was soon able to dry his eyes when Miyamoto changed his mind, giving the green light for the NES game and becoming its producer. Miyamoto would later fondly recall playing the game to completion, even despite the frustration of needing to restart his playthrough when his save file failed.

Itoi had begun his career as an advertising copywriter, before having the idea to make a role-playing game that swapped typical fantasy tropes for a real-life, suburban setting. The result was *Mother*: a joyously eccentric adventure that pits you as a young boy in a world modelled on small-town America. You fight turn-based battles against everything from your bedroom lamp to local hippies as you uncover a paranormal plot to wipe out humanity.

For Amelia Bone, co-director of the *Mother To Earth* documentary film and a former moderator of the Starmen.net fan website, the setting of the games is a big part of the appeal. "I think the thing that I love about the *Mother* series is how it breaks so far away from the fantasy RPG setting," Amelia explains to us. "A lot of people talk up the surrealism, but the thing that caught me was how mundane it all starts out." Amelia draws parallels with what she calls "monster-of-the-week" shows like *The X-Files*, in the sense that, "The characters are just normal people in an extraordinary set of circumstances. They're imbued with power as they go, but they gain deeper interest and context for what's happening alongside the player."

> "THE THING THAT I LOVE ABOUT THE MOTHER SERIES IS HOW IT BREAKS SO FAR AWAY FROM THE FANTASY RPG"
> AMELIA BONE

While *Mother* proved popular and sold well in Japan after its release in 1989, an English-language US localisation, which was fully ready to publish, was quietly cancelled. Amelia and her fellow filmmakers explored the mystery of this English version, and the surprise emergence of a prototype cartridge containing the game, in their documentary film, which we'll come back to later. Before that though, we should turn our focus to the better-known Super Nintendo sequel to *Mother*, which wouldn't be realised until six years after the first game.

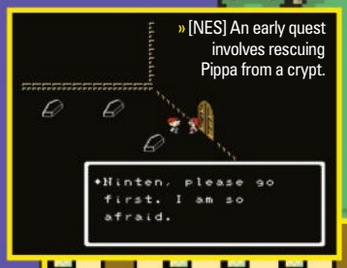
Itoi and his team at Ape Inc had already been developing the game that would become *EarthBound* for four years when, feeling it just wasn't coming together, they asked for help from Satoru Iwata and his team at HAL Laboratory. Iwata, best known for his later role as global president of Nintendo, became the lead programmer for the game and managed to turn the project around. Despite playing this important role, in his book *Ask Iwata*, Iwata credited Itoi and others at Ape Inc for giving the game its magic. Iwata wrote, "It may appear as if everything happened in the one year I was involved, but we were only able to get *EarthBound* that far in a year's time because of the four years of work that had already been completed. A game like that, with such a variety of interesting detail and character, could never result from a year-long sprint."

One aspect of the amazing work that went into *EarthBound* was carefully adapting it for a North American audience. The title *EarthBound* was the same one that had been planned for the cancelled English translation of *Mother*; it was resurfaced here in place of the Japanese title *Mother 2: Gigyas Strikes Back*. The man largely responsible for the much-loved US localisation that followed was then-Nintendo Of America employee Marcus Lindblom. Having lived in Japan for four years before working on localisation of *Wario's Woods*, Marcus was well-placed to understand Japanese culture and the original intent of Itoi's writing. "I was thankfully given quite a bit of leeway," Marcus tells us. "You know, putting in stuff that I hoped would ▶

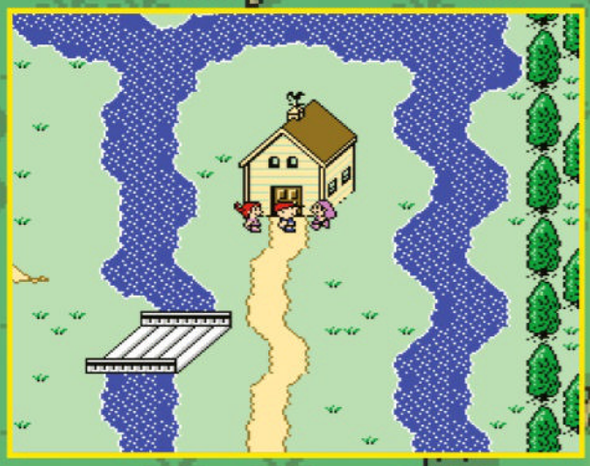
**MARCUS LINDBLOM**
■ Marcus was Nintendo's localisation director on *EarthBound*. He's since worked at companies including Electronic Arts and 2K.

**AMELIA BONE**
■ Amelia co-directed the crowdfunded documentary film *Mother To Earth: The Untold Story Of EarthBound*.

» [NES] Your first foe in *Mother* is your bedroom lamp.



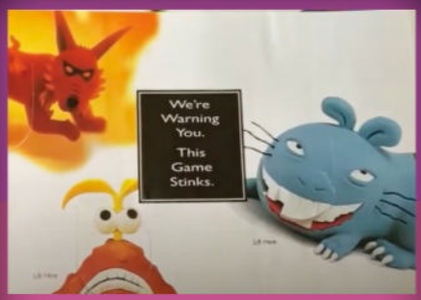

» [NES] An early quest involves rescuing Pippa from a crypt.



» [NES] *Mother* mixes everyday life with surreal happenings.

» [NES] Staying at hotels replenishes your health and psychic points.

» [NES] This noisy mouse is a cryptic conversationalist.

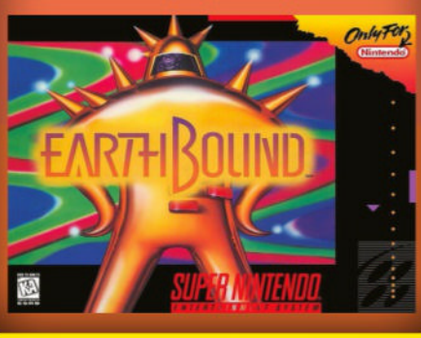



# THIS GAME STINKS

## UNPICKING THE UNUSUAL ADVERTISING OF EARTHBOUND

Nintendo deployed a strange US marketing campaign for *EarthBound* in 1995. A scratch-and-sniff magazine advert ran the headline, "This game stinks," and an explanation that, "You've never seen or smelled a role-playing game like this!" Fart jokes abounded in an advert that didn't quite match the subtle humour of the game. TV adverts were also commissioned, and the game was packaged in a huge box containing a 135-page strategy guide, which pushed the price up.

"Right out of the gate the price point was above almost every other game," Marcus reflects. "I was glad to have the strategy guide in there because I think it was a good tool for people and it was well done. But the expense was a lot for people. And when you have two games to choose between and one is $60 and the other is $80, a lot of families are going to go for the $60 game." He adds on the subsequent sales flop, "It sucked to see a game you spent a bunch of time on in Best Buy in a bin with a $10 price point on it." Nowadays though, this big box edition is highly coveted. Copies have sold for around £1,000 in recent auctions.



# THE LOST MOTHER 3

## REMEMBERING THE ABANDONED N64 GAME

Development of *Mother 3* began on the SNES, before Ape Inc moved its sights to the N64 and its 64DD floppy disk drive extension. Taking inspiration from *Super Mario 64*, the ambition was to bring the series into polygonal 3D and push the boundaries of what was possible on the hardware. The game would have been released as *EarthBound 64* in North America.

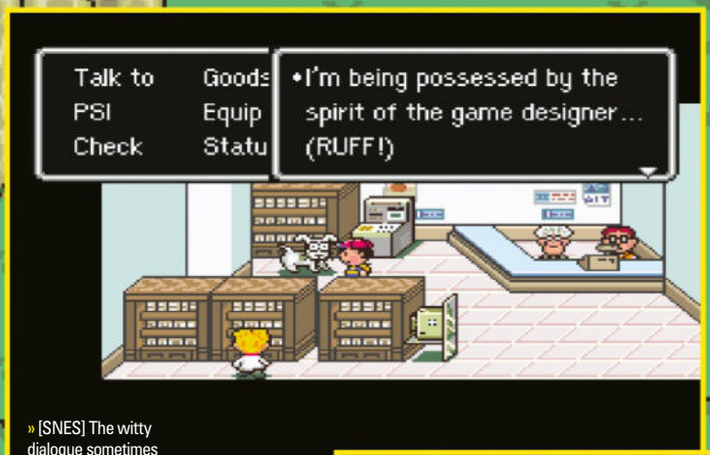
The extra power afforded by the 64DD allowed the team to dream big about what they could achieve, but when that peripheral flopped, the planned format reverted to cartridge. A playable version was then showcased at Nintendo's Space World 1999 trade show, with IGN reporting after getting hands-on with the prototype that it was "very far along" and seemingly "nearing its final stages of completion". But then in August 2000, the project was formally cancelled.

Itoi, Shigeru Miyamoto and Satoru Iwata (the latter pair being producers on the game) released a lengthy, apologetic cancellation interview. Iwata alluded to the challenge of "all the time and power it would take" to finish the game, while Miyamoto mentioned how "it would have had far too much an impact on other projects like Project Dolphin", a reference to the GameCube. Itoi meanwhile said the amount of complex programming work required to get the 12-chapter, elaborate plan over the finishing line was simply too much. Among other complex elements, Itoi had planned to include branching narratives, with your choices at certain points of the game having consequences.

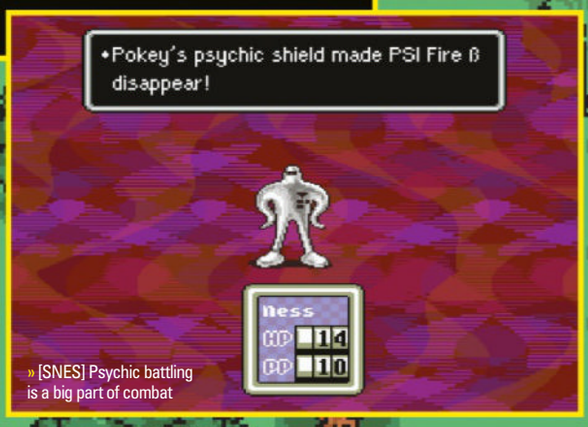
Nonetheless, the core storyline of the game was carried into the Game Boy Advance version of *Mother 3* that finally released to rave reviews in 2006. Magazine scans and screenshots can be found online showing what would have been on the N64, including some darker-looking scenes than the bright pixel art backdrops of the Game Boy Advance version.

"I WANTED IT TO BE GOOFY AND FUN, SOMETHING THAT COULD BE PLAYED AMONGST PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND ALSO FOR A LONG TIME"
MARCUS LINDBLOM

» [SNES] The first task in *EarthBound* is to investigate a meteorite.




» [SNES] The witty dialogue sometimes breaks the fourth wall.




» [SNES] Psychic battling is a big part of combat

fit with the tone that Itoi had put into the game. Because his original stuff was really fantastic with its irreverent feel. I've always thought *EarthBound* has a tone that is a bit anti-society almost, and it does things that are very subtle. There are just lots of little nuances in its text." Marcus was paired with Ape Inc's Masayuki Miura, whom Marcus greatly credits for helping him to understand the wider context of the game and the story. "Miura-san was really invaluable for getting the localisation to where it needed to be," Marcus stresses. The pair went through the huge volume of dialogue and descriptions from the heavily text-based game, both on printed sheets of paper and a coded text file, adjusting words as they went.

**Having grown up in what he describes as "a very Christian home" Marcus was able to produce text that trod a brilliant line between homeliness and just enough spiky, unruly attitude.** "I think kids that grow up in a church family in America, go through a phase where you learn to dance with what's OK or not to say. That helped me with the idea of softening things. I could have come out with something a lot more crass, but it didn't feel like the right thing to do with the way Itoi wrote. And we also wanted to fit in with the values that Nintendo espoused," Marcus continues. "We had to make certain changes to the game because there were certain things in North America that we couldn't do that they could in Japan, like having religious symbology. We took all that kind of stuff out. I tried to be probably over-cautious with a number of things in the game that felt a little too close to legal stuff, like a logo that looked too close to Coca Cola to me. They didn't actually say 'Cola', they said 'Come', and I was like, 'We're not gonna put a game out with that on the side of a truck.'"

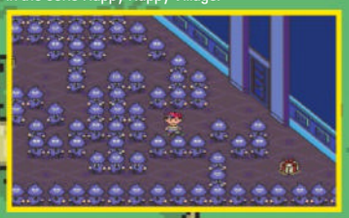
It added to the quirkiness of the end result that Japanese text sometimes came to Marcus and Miura out of context. "When you looked at the text file, things weren't always sequential in the conversation, so I wasn't always aware of the line that came before," Marcus says. "I think the goofy tone comes a bit from that." Other bits of goofiness were down to Marcus though, as he explains. "One of the lines in the game came directly from a guy working with us. He'd used the words 'spankety spankety spankety' in the office goofing around. It came to fill in that line for Pokey at the end of the game, and I had to put it in. I'm really glad I did because I think it fits perfectly into that whole character." The outcome of all this work was a wonderfully charming, off-kilter localisation. "I wanted it to be goofy and fun, something that could be played amongst people of all ages and also for a long time," Marcus summarises.

*EarthBound* would indeed achieve the longevity Marcus and Itoi had intended. But in the short term, it was a commercial disappointment in America and met mixed reviews. Marcus believes sales were partly down to an expensive price tag – the game came packaged in a special over-sized box with a strategy guide – but also graphics that clashed with a changing SNES game market. "*Donkey Kong Country* was coming out and we were right on the verge of hitting that 3D stuff, *Star Fox* and things like that, pulling in 3D environments," Marcus points out. "For lack of a better term, *EarthBound* was sort of a retro game even back then. It was a throwback to an NES style of art in a way. Every review I was reading brought up the graphics."

There would be one more *Mother* game to follow, but it would take 12 years of development and several console generations to get there. *Mother* 3 began life as a SNES game, before getting far into production as a N64 title that was eventually completely scrapped. It was finally released in 2006 for the Game Boy Advance, but only in Japan, with Nintendo Of America later explaining this as being related to "business needs" and the Game Boy Advance being late in its life cycle. Despite having very similar gameplay at its core to the two preceding games, *Mother* 3 packs some lovely iterations on that concept, including a musical combat mechanic where you can combo-attack enemies in time to a background beat. In the lead up to *Mother* 3 being released, Game Boy Advance players in Japan were also treated to a *Mother 1+2* compilation cartridge in 2003.

» [SNES] The charming pixel art graphics hold up well.

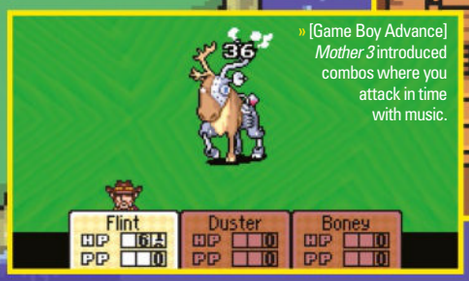
» [SNES] Maps show you where to eat, sleep and shop in each town.



» [SNES] Mingling with cult members in the eerie Happy Happy Village.

» [Game Boy Advance] Flint is a tough father figure and a key character in the third game.

» [Game Boy Advance] Like in the second game, you start *Mother 3* in your pyjamas.




» [Game Boy Advance] *Mother 3* introduced combos where you attack in time with music.

By the point *Mother 3* launched, the series had built up an intensely passionate online community in the West, partly centred around the Starmen.net fan website that had been founded in the late-Nineties. Some younger fans had become aware of the series thanks to the *Super Smash Bros* games, which have featured Ness (the main hero of *EarthBound*) as a playable character from the first N64 entry of the series onwards. Intense fandom for the series, according to Shigesato Itoi, was one of the catalysts for something special happening in 2015 when Nintendo released *EarthBound Beginnings* for the Wii U Virtual Console. This was the lost English translation of the original *Mother* for the NES from 1989, released with a new title.

Before the official release of *EarthBound Beginnings*, the English translation of the first game in the series had only been playable through emulation. That was possible due to an online ROM dump, sourced from a prototype cartridge that made it into the hands of collectors and caused a buzz online in 1998 (this emulated prototype version became known as *EarthBound Zero*, a name that was hacked into the title screen of the shared ROM). This prototype story is forensically examined by Amelia and her co-director Evan Butler in their crowdfunded film *Mother To Earth*. "Honestly, I kind of stumbled into making the film," Amelia concedes. "When I was a staff member on Starmen.net, I was always keen to learn as much as I could about the translation process for *EarthBound Beginnings* in my off time. I was a junior or senior in high school with access to Google, so I just looked up everything I could. I tracked down prototypes, sifted through old web pages, and met head localiser Phil Sandhop in a coffee shop."

**The film also sees the crew travel to Japan for a moving interview with rock star and composer Keiichi Suzuki, who wrote the music for the first two games of the series.** Amelia looks back on the project fondly. "It's admittedly a little weird to see my old self on camera after having come out as a trans woman, but that's easy to push past. I'm still proud of how it turned out." She does have one request for Nintendo, though. "The only question I still have about this process is what happened to the original box art and other print assets for the NES release. I know that they existed at some point, because I literally made mock-ups of them based on Phil's description. Show me the box art, cowards!"

*EarthBound Beginnings* and *EarthBound* would both make it to the Nintendo Switch eventually, which is an easy way to play them today. *EarthBound* was also included on the SNES Mini console, in another sign of Nintendo valuing the legacy of the series. What is it that's kept the love for the trilogy so strong? "I think it's two-fold," reasons Amelia. "First off, the series is centred around themes of love and strength in community. That part's easy. The second part, though, the explosion? Genuinely, if *EarthBound Beginnings* had come out when it was supposed to, or if *Mother 3* had gotten an English release, the fandom wouldn't have gotten so dedicated. Fandom yearns to fill any possible gap with fan creation or collaborative action, and the more enticing the gap the more devoted the following." Marcus is also in awe of the legacy of the series and the community that has built around it. "Couples have come out of the community and they've got families now, they've got kids," he says proudly. "It's satisfying to me on a personal level. I've had people tell me over the years that *EarthBound* has helped them through tough times."

The late, great Iwata also summed up the unique appeal of the series nicely in his book *Iwata Asks*. He wrote, "*Mother* takes the large-scale format typical of Japanese RPGs, so in that sense it isn't necessarily special. Still, the overall effect is a game unlike almost any other. I think this is the cumulative result of all the aspects of the gaming experience – the fun parts, sad parts, outlandish parts, and goofy parts that Shigesato Itoi packed into the game. There really isn't anything else like it out there." ★

» [Game Boy Advance] You'll meet many quirky characters throughout the game's story.

» [Game Boy Advance] Regular cutscenes keep the intriguing story moving along.

» [Wii U] Ness is a playable character in the *Super Smash Bros* games.

"I'VE HAD PEOPLE TELL ME OVER THE YEARS THAT EARTHBOUND HAS HELPED THEM THROUGH TOUGH TIMES"

MARCUS LINDBLOM

# FOUND IN TRANSLATION

## HOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS RALLIED TO TRANSLATE MOTHER 3

Appetite for an English translation of *Mother 3* was strong enough after its Game Boy Advance launch that a petition of 31,000 signatures was delivered to Nintendo. When it became clear that no official localisation was forthcoming, fans took things into their own hands. The US *EarthBound* community rallied around the development of a fan translation, with professional translator Clyde Mandelin, known online as Tomato, leading the charge.

In 2008, after two years of work, version 1.0 of the *Mother 3* fan translation patch was launched. According to the official website of the project (Mother3.fobby.net) the patch was downloaded well over 100,000 times in the following months.

On his Legends Of Localisation website, Mandelin sheds some light on the process. "I started by doing a first draft translation of the script, which took about a month," he writes. "After that, fellow Starmen.net member Jeff (online name: Jeffman) and I worked hard to learn how to program for the Game Boy Advance, then we applied that knowledge to 'hack' (reprogram, in other words) large parts of the game's programming to accommodate the English text." He describes the project as "An epic quest of its own with lots of party members coming and going, NPCs on the sidelines, and evil bosses to defeat."

THE
MOTHER 3
FAN TRANSLATION
THIS IS A FREE, UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION MADE ENTIRELY BY DEDICATED MOTHER / EARTHBOUND FANS. PLEASE SUPPORT THIS SERIES BY PURCHASING OFFICIAL MERCHANDISE, INCLUDING THE OFFICIAL TRANSLATION IF ONE IS EVER RELEASED.
English v1.1
THE TRANSLATION TEAM
MOTHER3.FOBBY.NET

# A TRIBUTE TO

# The BITMAP BROTHERS

AFTER DEFINING 16-BIT GAMING WITH TITLES SUCH AS SPEEDBALL 2 AND THE CHAOS ENGINE, THE BITMAP BROTHERS GRACED PCS AND CONSOLES WITH THE LIKES OF Z AND STEEL SOLDIERS. FOUNDER **MIKE MONTGOMERY** REVIEWS THE ILLUSTRIOUS STUDIO'S GREATEST GAMES

Words by Rory Milne

**Founded by Mike Montgomery, Eric Matthews and Steve Kelly, The Bitmap Brothers' 1988 debut *Xenon* was an innovative arcade-quality shooter, while its subsequent release *Speedball* depicted a compelling violent future sport in pixel form.** The following year saw the Bitmaps wow gamers with its ambitious sequel *Xenon II: Megablast*, and in 1990 this enviable run continued with the isometric adventure *Cadaver* and the superlative follow-up *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*.

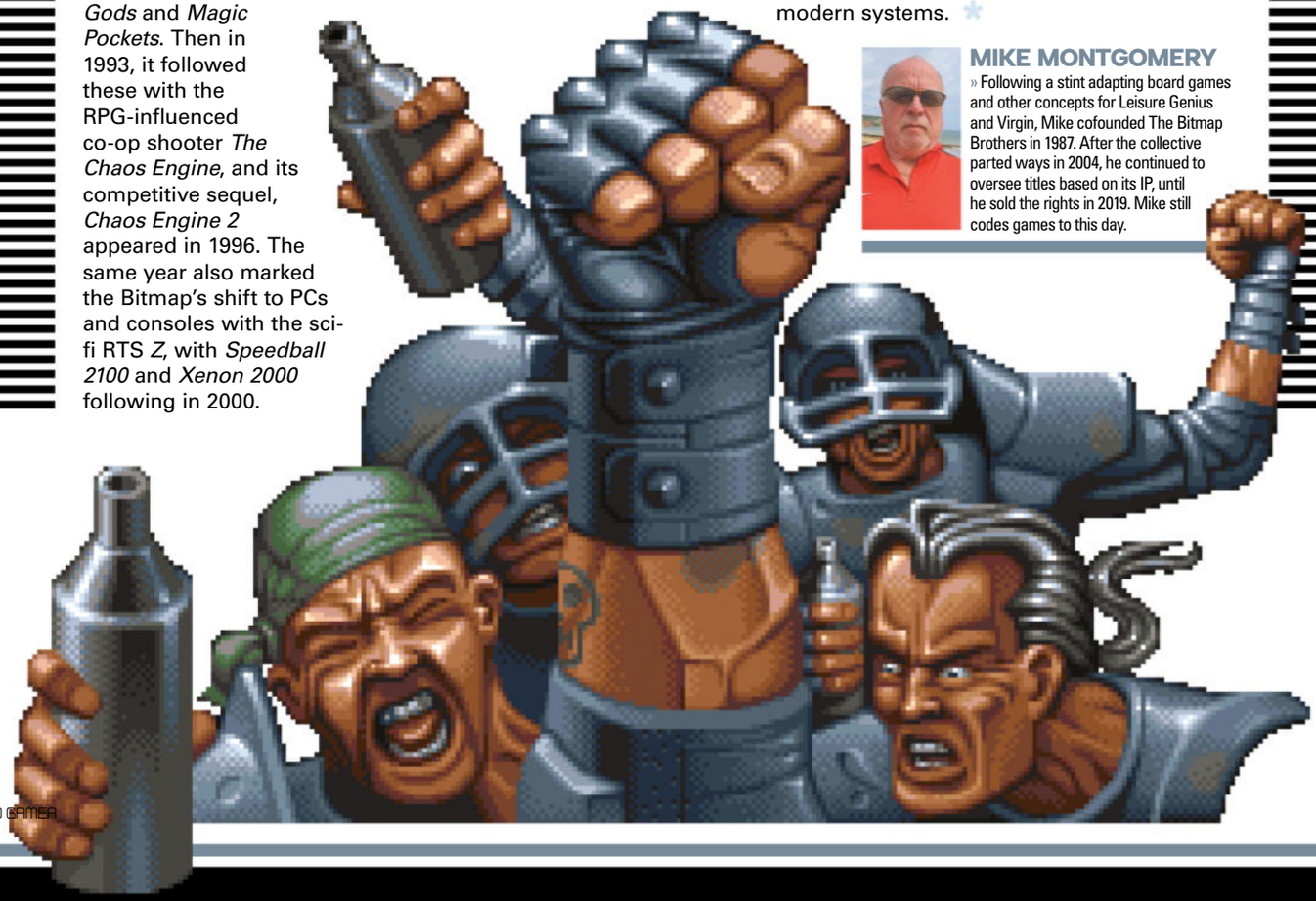
In 1991, the collective impressed with its *Cadaver* add-on *The Payoff*, and with two eclectic platformers: *Gods* and *Magic Pockets*. Then in 1993, it followed these with the RPG-influenced co-op shooter *The Chaos Engine*, and its competitive sequel, *Chaos Engine 2* appeared in 1996. The same year also marked the Bitmap's shift to PCs and consoles with the sci-fi RTS *Z*, with *Speedball 2100* and *Xenon 2000* following in 2000.

Building on the success of *Z*, the firm released the RTSes *Z: Steel Soldiers* and *World War II: Frontline Command* in 2001 and 2003, although sadly the studio shut down not long after. Mike subsequently used The Bitmap Brothers name in 2006 while developing the coin-op *Ford Racing: Full Blown*. The Bitmap's IP then lived on in a series of adaptations, all under Mike's watchful eye, concluding with the 2014 *Steel Soldiers* remake for Steam. Mike subsequently sold the Bitmap rights to Rebellion in 2019, and for now, its plans are unknown, but Bitmap fans can only hope that it reimagines the likes of *Xenon*, *Speedball* and *Z* for modern systems.



**MIKE MONTGOMERY**

» Following a stint adapting board games and other concepts for Leisure Genius and Virgin, Mike cofounded The Bitmap Brothers in 1987. After the collective parted ways in 2004, he continued to oversee titles based on its IP, until he sold the rights in 2019. Mike still codes games to this day.



# XENON

ATARI ST, VARIOUS • 1988

It speaks volumes about the quality of the Bitmaps' shooter that it was lauded on its release for bringing the arcades home. Beyond its coin-op credentials, *Xenon* innovates with a clever morphing mechanic, where you turn your dog-fighting aerial craft into a ground-based tank.

MIKE'S MEMORIES

*Xenon* came about because we used to play a lot of games in the arcades, so we wanted to make it as arcade-y as possible. Something we were playing there must have influenced the decision to have a tank that could turn into a spaceship, but it was also to give variation as well. We probably designed *Xenon* when we had been down the arcades, and on to the pub to get pissed!

# SPEEDBALL

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1988

Its players may be dressed for American football, but *Speedball*'s confined pitches, frenetic pace and use of deflection are more in keeping with a rowdy five-a-side football match! Power-ups and pinball bumpers add to the fun, while the game's future setting gives it an extra cool look.

MIKE'S MEMORIES

We were asked by Mastertronic to make a game based on 'real tennis', which has courts that have holes in the walls that you can score through. We also used to play a lot of pinball, which was where the bumpers came from. But after we had done an awful lot of research and came up with the game design for [the game] Mastertronic changed its mind, so we designed *Speedball*.

# XENON 2: MEGABLAST

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1989

There's a lot more to the second *Xenon* title than the first, but at the same time its gameplay feels more focussed thanks to it keeping you in an airborne craft throughout. *Xenon 2*'s most obvious additions include parallax backgrounds, far more impressive bosses and a greater emphasis on power-ups. This last feature is accommodated by both in-game pick-ups and between-stage shops, with the better weapons on offer being essential to progress.

MIKE'S MEMORIES

We put a shop in there to make it a little more interesting, because to be quite honest, some shoot-'em-ups of that type were quite boring. We were working with Mirrorsoft at the time, and they gave us a free copy of the RPG *Dungeon Master*. That might have also had something to do with the shop in *Xenon 2*.

## WHO'S THE BOSS? HOW TO BEAT THE POPULAR SHOOTER'S MAYORS

### NAUTILUS SHELLFISH

■ The first boss in *Xenon 2* takes some inspiration from *R-Type*'s Dobkeratops, although it's more octopus-like. Avoid its tentacle while targeting its eye.

### GIANT ARACHNID

■ As if a huge spider wasn't enough, the *Xenon 2* mayor continually hatches young, and they spit lasers at you! Keep your guns aimed at the big bug's core to beat it.

### DEFORMED DRAGON

■ A behemoth of a boss, *Xenon 2*'s dragon spans multiple screens and is lethal at both ends. Take out its swinging spiked tail, and then destroy its head.

### KILLER CHAMELEON

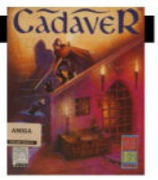
■ *Xenon 2*'s massive reptile can be bested by avoiding its tongue. If you have a suitable weapon you should target its eyes and head from the side.

### DEADLY DREADNOUGHT

■ The hulking space cruiser at *Xenon 2*'s finale is armed to the teeth and shielded to absorb endless enemy fire. Blast each of its rotating turrets to bring it down.

# CADAVER

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1990



At first glance, *Cadaver* looks like a 16-bit *Knight Lore*, but its objectives are far more RPG-like. Weapons have hit points and enemies can take varying damage, and as well as physical challenges there are object and obstacle-oriented puzzles to work out.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

We made an adventure because we wanted to do something different; that was where *Cadaver* came from. I suppose we made it isometric because of the Ultimate games, but I think the biggest influence was *Dungeon Master*, even though that was pseudo 3D. It was originally called *Anneka*, after Anneka Rice, because it was a treasure hunt, and she was doing *Treasure Hunt* at the time. Right at the very end we called it *Cadaver*, which of course is a dead body. It was a bit of a grim name, but it was set in dungeons, so it fitted really well.

# SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1990

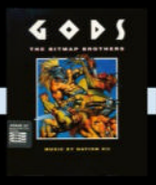
Although it's based on the original, *Speedball 2* is notable for its many enhancements. Its four-way scrolling allows for a wider pitch, and nine players per side instead of five. You get points for knocking out opponents, and there are point multiplier ramps on the walls. It's an excellent sequel.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

There was no blood in *Speedball 2* because we were against violence. Any violence we did have was cartoon violence, and wasn't real. *Speedball 2* was really what we couldn't do with the original *Speedball*, because there were a few years between them. When we did *Speedball* everything was a learning curve. We added horizontal scrolling to *Speedball 2* to get as much space as possible, because we were quite limited with the power and RAM of the machines to do that sort of game.

# GODS

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1991



It's not easy to describe *Gods*, because the ancient Grecian action title dips its toe into a few genres. It's certainly a decent little platformer, and one that requires some accurate jumping. But it also has hoards of mythical creatures to fight off and level guardian bosses to topple, which gives it the feel of a run-and-gun at times. There's treasure to collect, which is used to buy weapons between levels, and then there are puzzles. The simpler ones are just lock and key challenges, but more tricky examples require experimentation with environmental features.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

We wanted something that was based on Greek gods. That was how the style came about. Possibly the puzzles came in based on *Cadaver*, I believe they were both being done at the same time, although *Gods* had different types of puzzles.

## GODLIKE GAMEPLAY

THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE DIVINE ACTION GAME

### PERILOUS PLATFORMING

■ The platforms in *Gods* are teeming with mythical monstrosities and mediaeval hazards, so it pays to look before you leap. Precise positioning is also required when jumping between certain platforms.

### PERPLEXING PUZZLES

■ With some of *Gods*' puzzles, you find keys to unlock doors, but its trickier conundrums involve lever systems. With these, you have to raise and lower levers spread around a level to trigger exits.

### CONSIDERED COMBAT

■ The weapons in *Gods* are like an arcade shooter's; the basic model is great for the early stages but useless on the later ones. You can buy upgrades of various types, and use three of them at once.

### MIGHTY MAYORS

■ In *Gods*, the end-of-level bosses are called guardians, and they don't disappoint. They include a colossal gladiator, a dragon, a Minotaur and a metal skull that fires hazards from every orifice.

# MAGIC POCKETS

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1991

Compared to *Gods*, *Magic Pockets* is far more of a traditional platformer, although its mechanics are anything but unoriginal. Each of its levels sees the player character the Bitmap Kid armed with an unusual weapon: mini whirlwinds, clouds, ice cubes or snowballs. The modes of transport in *Magic Pockets* are equally novel, including a space hopper and bubble gum bubbles that allow the kid to float around levels. Last but not least are the game's eclectic collectibles, which range from bottles of pop to Bitmap shades.

MIKE'S MEMORIES

*Magic Pockets* was based on one of the designers who worked on it and designed it. He was thinking about when he was a kid and what he was collecting in his pockets. That was the premise behind collecting stuff in the game and then getting it out of your pockets so you could use it. It's something that kids don't do much now! We designed each level based on the weapon that the kid had to get the best out of it. So the levels were all quite different from each other for that reason.

## POCKETING PICK-UPS A GUIDE TO THE CUTE PLATFORMER'S COLLECTIBLES

### SWEET TREATS

■ As well as collecting point-boosting sweets you find lying around, you can trap foes and turn them into bonus sweets.

### STAR QUALITY

■ You occasionally get a silver star for trapping foes. If you collect enough of these you get a gold star and a helmet.

### HELPFUL HELMETS

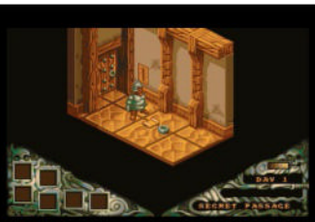
■ These give you invulnerability, kill foes you make contact with, transport you to secret rooms and fire deadly lasers.

### FUN WITH GUM

■ When you come across a bubble gum dispenser grab some gum! Once you've blown a bubble you can float around the level.

### TOP TOYS

■ Find the bike, boxing gloves, diving helmet and space hopper to win the game. You're invulnerable while you have them.



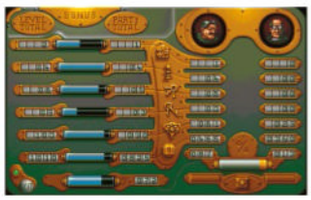
# CADAVER: THE PAYOFF

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1991

Considering that *The Payoff* is an expansion pack for *Cadaver*, it could have just been more of the same, but that's not the case. Of course, it delivers fresh new levels in the style of the original adventure, but its opponents and puzzles are more sophisticated. Rather than mindlessly targeting the player character, the foes in *The Payoff* pose a less immediate threat. In fact, you can leverage some enemies' love of gold to trick them into collecting hard to reach treasure for you. The expansion's puzzles are equally nuanced, For example, there are slots that respond differently when you deposit documents belonging to different characters.

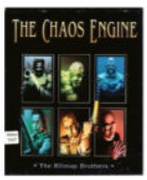
MIKE'S MEMORIES

We thought it would be easier if we could concentrate on designing the gameplay rather than the engine for *The Payoff*. It was a case of spreading the development over two projects, where *Cadaver* was designed so that we could just add *The Payoff*. I don't really know why it was more difficult. It was probably because we designed games that we wanted to play, and sometimes we were better at playing them than the public.



# THE CHAOS ENGINE

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1993




At its most basic level, *The Chaos Engine* is a fun top-down shooter, but its layers of gameplay give it a lot more depth. Two player characters work together against opponents – in solo games one hero is played by the computer, and each has contrasting attributes that can be upgraded between stages. The protagonists start with unique main weapons, and can acquire secondary weapons and other useful items they find scattered around the levels.

MIKE'S MEMORIES

The idea was that *The Chaos Engine* was like an RPG, where you spent the money you had collected on improving your characters. I think that was the next progression at the time with that type of game. It made it quite hard to design the game, because we had to balance it. We had to play it and play it again, building up the different attributes of the characters to make sure that it was totally playable. Then we wanted upgrades that each did something different, so that it wasn't just a case of having them in there for no reason other than to make the game look bigger.

# THE CHAOS ENGINE 2

AMIGA, AMIGA CD32 • 1996

The characters from *The Chaos Engine* return in the sequel, but instead of co-operating they have to solve puzzles, undertake tasks or collect items before their opposite number and then escape the level. The rivals can also shoot each other down in this entertaining sequel.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

*The Chaos Engine 2* was based on *Spy Vs Spy*, which was split-screen and competitive. We really enjoyed playing that, and we wanted to make *The Chaos Engine 2* different from *The Chaos Engine*. There was no point putting something out that was the same as the original. But by the time *The Chaos Engine 2* came out the 16-bit market had disappeared, so we only sold about 4,000 units. We lost an awful lot of money with that. We had boxes of *The Chaos Engine 2* that we threw away. I wish I'd kept them because they're worth a bloody fortune now.

## CHAOS COACHING

HOW TO SURVIVE THE RUN-AND-GUN'S DEATHMATCHES

### SHOOT-'EM-UP

■ Taking your opponent out to stop them completing a task allows you to do so instead. You also need to blast trigger happy robots.

### OBJECT LESSON

■ Quite often you have to locate certain items, protect them from your rival and get them to the exit. Then you need to find a key.

### AMAZING ABILITIES

■ The pick-ups on offer include a freeze bomb, a teleport blast, a cloning device and explosives that are triggered by door handles.

### TASK MASTER

■ Before each level, an impartial arbiter sets the player characters a series of tasks to perform before they can escape the stage.

# Z

PC, VARIOUS • 1996

The beauty of *Z* is that it removes the grind required by traditional RTS titles, which results in a more arcade-like experience. There's no resource collection to be done and construction is limited to building droids to occupy land and take into battle.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

We designed *Z* from the very beginning to be a multiplayer game. The single-player came in later on once we had designed all of the levels for multiplayer. They were all symmetrical so that neither of the players were at a disadvantage, and winning was all down to how they played. From those we analysed how people played it, and then we wrote the AI around that. We wanted to make *Z* easy to play. It was almost like an RTS that was arcade-y. The look and the feel was important too, and with the robots, of course, that meant that there was no blood either. We also tried to put as much comedy into it as possible.

# XENON 2000: PROJECT PCF

PC • 2000

As a magazine covermount, the single-level *Xenon 2000* was well worth the price of admission. It recreates the fevered firefights of its 16-bit predecessors perfectly, while adding better visuals, an epic end boss and nice touches like a tribute to Atari's classic coin-op *Asteroids*.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

*Xenon 2000* was designed to be given away with a magazine. It paid us to do it, and it wasn't for an awful lot of money, so the game that came with the magazine was all that we actually did. We didn't want to do a full game anyway, that wasn't an option at the time. It wasn't intended to be the start of a full release, and we never intended to do more levels. John Phillips coded it, and then Mark Coleman was the artist. It was probably John who influenced the decision to have a tribute to *Asteroids* partway through.

# SPEEDBALL 2100

PLAYSTATION • 2000

An evolution of the earlier games rather than a total reinvention, *Speedball 2100*'s most immediate differences are its polygon visuals, lighting effects and atmospheric audio. In terms of gameplay, the sequel has all the pace, brutality and features found in *Speedball 2*, although it makes a difference that throwing the ball, attacking opponents and jumping are mapped to different buttons. *Speedball 2100* boasts a few new options, such as a Manager Mode, where you purely upgrade player stats and arrange new signings with money your players collect in matches.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

"Because it came out on the PlayStation we were told it had to be rendered in 3D, but you could press a button and it would change to the original graphics. What we didn't want to do was break the gameplay, and we felt that if you changed the perspective then it would make the gameplay completely different. If you like, it was a console conversion of *Speedball 2*, but then we added the 3D graphics to it to make it more acceptable."

## MERCILESS MECHANICS

KEY ASPECTS OF THE BRUTAL SPORT SEQUEL

### CHARACTER BUILDING

■ Upgrades to your players' Aggression, Speed, Power and various other attributes can be bought between matches. You can also change their names and their uniforms.

### SKILL VS SAVAGERY

■ *Speedball 2100* is played at speed, making accurate passing an acquired skill, but until you learn how not to fumble the ball you can get points for violent challenges.

### PERFORMANCE POWER-UPS

■ Players can boost their abilities with in-game pick-ups. They can also stymie their rivals with items that freeze them to the spot and otherwise disadvantage them.

### BAGGING BONUSES

■ Score multipliers let you rack up massive scores. Each time you throw the ball around the ramps mounted to the sides of the stadiums you get more points per goal.

# Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

PC, VARIOUS • 2001

Unlike *Z*, *Steel Soldiers* revolves around specific missions rather than simply claiming territory and rushing the enemy. The other change is that you need to find plots to construct radar stations and factories where combat and construction droids are built.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

"I think we wanted to make *Steel Soldiers* more of an RTS than *Z*. It was in 3D as well, whereas *Z* was in 2D. We did a lot of research. We played lots of RTSes, because we wanted ours to be better. So we had a look at what they were doing. The AI was quite a lot of work. When the designer and I were doing a press tour, we believed it was learning from us playing. Because every time we showed it off we ended up saying, 'Fuck! It hasn't done that before!' It just kept learning new things each time we played it."

# PAC-MAN WORLD 2

PC • 2002

Like the console originals, the Bitmap's PC port of *Pac-Man World 2* sees the popular yellow mascot undertaking a 3D platforming adventure. Naturally there's a lot of platforming and exploration involved, but fans of the 1980 original are well served throughout with dot munching, power-pills, turning the tables on ghosts and even post-level renditions of the tune played in Pac-Man's debut. Of course, with *Pac-Man World 2* being set in a 3D world full of platforming challenges its leading man needs some new moves. As well as butt-bouncing enemies, he has a Flip Kick to take out aerial foes and a Rev Roll, which is a speedy charging attack that also allows him to jump wide gaps. In terms of level design, there are areas themed around leafy canyons, frozen vistas, a subterranean realm and a deep ocean. In some of these locations, Pac-Man gets special equipment like ice skates or a submarine, and there are bosses for him to defeat after completing each world.

# WORLD WAR II: FRONTLINE COMMAND

PC • 2003

There's no construction or amassing resources in *Frontline Command*. Instead you're given troops and military vehicles, and tasked with running missions against the Axis forces. This focus on tactical battle makes *Frontline Command* an even more arcade-y RTS than *Z*.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

There was a conversation going on in the office, and somebody suggested we did something based on fact. So one of the artists changed all the models from *Steel Soldiers* into a WWII army, because we thought that WWII was actually a very interesting time. We started work on the graphics, and we took it to Codemasters, and it was exactly what it wanted. So we signed up with Codemasters, and then a year later it dropped it. In the end I managed to get publishers around the world to put it out. It was the most publishers we had for one of our games, but that allowed us to finish it off.

## COMPELLING COMBAT MEMORABLE MISSIONS OF THE RTS WWII TITLE

### RADAR RAID
■ You have to send engineers into enemy territory via the safest route, avoiding Nazis until they reach and bomb a radar bunker.

### BRIDGE CONTROL
■ Two bridges protected by submachine gun units need to be destroyed, then you have to secure a third bridge without damaging it.

### D-DAY
■ After a brutal beach landing, your surviving troops have to destroy a channel gun, defence bunkers and the Nazi command bunker.

### SEARCH AND DESTROY
■ You have three tank units to take out three mobile radar units, but they're guarded by Panzer IVs, so some stealth is required.

### APPROPRIATE AN AIRFIELD
■ You use field guns, half tracks and a sniper to secure an airfield, then you send the survivors to take out anti-aircraft guns.

# DEAD TO RIGHTS

PC • 2003

Another of the Bitmap's console to PC adaptations, *Dead To Rights* covers a lot of bases with its eclectic and entertaining gameplay. The story-led third-person action game puts you in the role of a cop investigating his father's murder, which allows for all kinds of gaming genres to be brought into the mix. *Tomb Raider*-style exploration is required as you follow the trail of the criminals you're tracking down, and when you encounter anyone from the crime world you either get third-person shooter setpieces or beat-'em-up-style brawling to deal with. You have a canine ally in some encounters, which you can set on opponents providing his meter is full. You also have some bullet-time moves, where time stands still for your enemies while you dive and roll around while picking them off with well-aimed bullets. Last but not least, *Dead To Rights* gives you timing challenges, including weight lifting in prison and distracting bouncers as an exotic dancer!

# KILL.SWITCH

PC • 2003

Namco's stealth-focussed third-person shooter was the third PC conversion of a console title handled by The Bitmap Brothers. The first thing you notice about *kill.switch* is that there are doors, windows, pillars, furniture and other large objects everywhere you go. The reason for this is that your progress depends on using a cover system rather than running into battle all guns blazing. This works differently depending on what you use for cover. If you have your back to a wall near a doorway, you inch your way along and then peek around to take a shot before retreating to cover. You can use pillars in the same way, and then with furniture you crouch behind and peek over occasionally to gun down foes. Another option is to blind fire at your opposition, which keeps you safe from return fire at the cost of not being able to see your targets. Then far off foes can be taken out with certain weapons that are equipped with scopes. Aside from shooting enemies, *kill.switch* has you setting traps using tripwires and timed explosives, and solving lock and key puzzles. It's difficult, but fun.

# FORD RACING: FULL BLOWN

ARCADE • 2006

Developed by Mike Montgomery under The Bitmap Brothers name, this is an arcade version of the PC and console title *Ford Racing 3*. The available vehicles are split into Classic, Modern, Performance and Off-Road categories. The AI competitors are as unforgiving as you would expect from a coin-op, but that aside, the game is most fun when racing against friends.

### MIKE'S MEMORIES

"The reason *Full Blown* was credited to The Bitmap Brothers is because I developed it as an ex-Bitmap Brother. So of course we had The Bitmap Brothers logo on it. I remember having 12 monitors in my garage, because I had to have the game running on seven development machines. Because of the heat in the garage I had to have an air conditioning unit put into it! *Full Blown* needed seven computers because the game had to run on six, and I wanted two monitors on each: one for what the player was seeing and another for debugging. It was a six-seater game that you could literally buy in 'seats', where you could buy six seats or just three seats or whatever."

# SPEEDBALL 2 HD

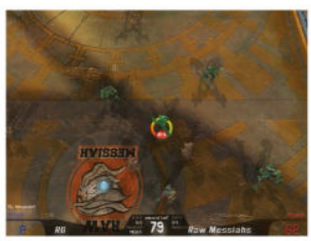
PC • 2007

The Jon Hare directed *Speedball 2 HD* is far more of a literal update of *Speedball 2* than its immediate predecessor *Speedball 2: Tournament*, but that's not to say that it doesn't innovate as well as delivering the HD visuals denoted by its title. To begin with, after your team proves itself against lower-ranked sides it gets promoted to an Intergalactic Cup. The matches in this tournament take place against alien teams on their home planets, each of which has a different theme: ice, fire and cyber. The game's other new feature allows you to decide pre-game whether you want your team to be very defensive, defensive, regular, offensive or very offensive, and you can change this setting during play if it turns out not to be a winning strategy. In other areas, *Speedball 2 HD* offers fan service to those that loved the original games. The sound effects are exactly the same as *Speedball 2*'s, right down to the simulated noise of a floppy disk drive whirring before matches start. Just as importantly, *Speedball 2 HD* reinstates the brutal tackles that were toned down for *Speedball 2: Tournament*, making it equal parts violence and skill.

# SPEEDBALL 2: TOURNAMENT

PC • 2007

With *Speedball 2: Tournament* coming out almost 20 years after the originals there are naturally changes to the way the sport is depicted. There's far more detail to the players and the stadiums, and you can see all of the players on the pitch at the same time using the default view. That's not to say that *Speedball* purists are neglected, however, as the numerous available perspectives include the classic top-down look of the Amiga titles. The teams are equally customisable; you can change your side's name and uniform, and save up for hot new players to boost your chances. There are options to take control of your goalkeeper whenever you like and to target your nearest teammate when you make a pass, which takes the pain out of learning how to make precision passes. The slide attack is noticeably less impactful than it was in the 16-bit games, which produces more fluid games while dialling down the wanton violence. That said, the goalkeeper can really knock the stuffing out of forwards!



# BITMAP FOREVER

MIKE MONTGOMERY ON HIS POST-BITMAP PROJECTS

"I love programming, that's why I'm still working. From *Full Blown* I worked with Empire, and we did *Taito Legends*. I've done loads of stuff since. When I worked on *Project Cars 2* for Simply Mad Studios, I think I had at least 20 steering wheels! I worked on *Onrush*, I helped finish that off, and I worked in Italy on *SBK*, the motorbike racing game. It's quite funny, because one of my first games was *Scalextric* for Leisure Genius, and I told it I'd never do another racing game again after that. I think I've worked on ten now!"

Peripheral Vision

# Justifier

» **PLATFORM:** Mega Drive » **YEAR:** 1993
» **COST:** £54.99 (launch, with game), £65+ (today, boxed with game), £15+ (today, unboxed)

**Lightgun peripherals can be a tough sell if the software isn't there to support them, and Sega knows that all too well** – backing for the official Menacer gun for the Mega Drive was non-existent, save for the worthwhile *T2: The Arcade Game*. Menacer owners must have been thrilled when they learned the arcade hit *Lethal Enforcers* was coming to the Mega Drive, but Konami was no saviour of the peripheral. The developer chose not to implement Menacer support in favour of its own Justifier, a wired peripheral that was bundled with the game and resembled a Colt Python handgun.

The Justifier was a regrettable misfire, that was no better supported than the Menacer and only served to split an already tiny market. Konami's *Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters* was the only other cartridge to support the Justifier, and the Mega-CD ports of the *Lethal Enforcers* games and *Snatcher* also supported it. However, while Mega-CD conversions of American Laser Games fare like *Mad Dog McCree* supported both gun standards, *Body Count* on cart and *Corpse Killer* on CD only supported the Menacer.

## Justifier fact

■ The pink player two Justifier was sold exclusively via Konami. It doesn't connect to the console, instead linking directly to the blue gun via an RJ-45 connector, so it's also compatible with the SNES.

SUPPLIED BY
**EVAN AMOS**

## ESSENTIAL GAME
### LETHAL ENFORCERS

Though Konami would have argued that the law enforcement theme made for plenty of *justified* violence, *Lethal Enforcers* proved surprisingly controversial in America. With gun-related homicides at a 20-year high and age ratings yet to be established, there was a sense of moral panic around gun violence in games in the early Nineties, and combining an imitation firearm with digitised sprites was seen by some as a step too far. Controversy aside, the game the Justifier was made for is merely a competent gun game – but on the Mega Drive, that's a rarity.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

# ALIEN 3

## THE GUN

**THIS IS RUMOUR CONTROL, HERE ARE THE FACTS. IN 1993 SEGA RELEASED AN ARCADE GAME BASED ON ALIEN 3 - A MOVIE THAT FAMOUSLY FEATURED NO GUNS - AND YET IT WAS TITLED ALIEN 3: THE GUN. JOIN US AS WE FATHOM OUT THIS COSMIC CONTRADICTION**

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

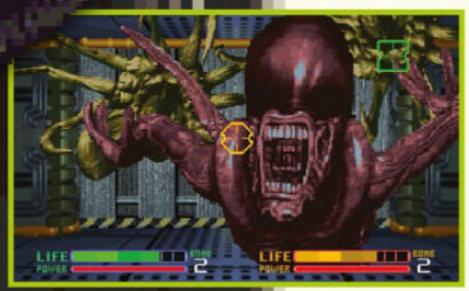
**When there's a divisive entry in a popular series, there's often an effort to retrospectively change it, to *fix* it.** This is quite apparent with *Alien 3*, where various 'alternative takes' have been released since the movie opened in 1992. These stories, often based on early rejected scripts, reveal what might have happened if Hicks and Newt, the two survivors of *Aliens* besides Ripley, had not perished three seconds into the film. And if the setting was not a prison planet populated by bald British thesps.

A similar problem faced the software houses who licensed the game. Presumably they echoed Ripley's query when she discovered one particular drawback of deep space correctional facilities, "You have no weapons of any kind?!" That's right, zero guns – and just *one* alien. Quite a change of pace from that stand-up fight that was *Aliens*. No matter, as the software houses simply retconned those trivial details and filled their games with aliens in every form, from Facehuggers to Queens. And of course players had access to Pulse Rifles. flamethrowers, grenades, giant cans of Raid – the lot.

Sega followed suit and went further still with its arcade tie-in game, developed by its AM1 division. Here, even Ripley was jettisoned, along with most of the film's plot. It begins with a pair of unnamed Colonial Marines docking with the Sulaco and discovering it's crawling with aliens. Then, an escape vehicle takes them down to Fiorina 161, the same desolate planet as featured in the film – except here the secure facility is guarded by an automated defence system (imagine an army of jumped-up Johnny 5s). Breach that and you're into the prison complex where many more aliens and assorted monstrosities are lining up to be shot. At the end of each of the seven stages there's a battle against an oversized guardian (see the Boss Rush panel).

> "IF THE SUBTITLE DIDN'T GIVE IT AWAY, ALIEN 3: THE GUN IS A LIGHTGUN GAME"

If the subtitle didn't give it away, *Alien 3: The Gun* is a lightgun game. Although it's not a genuine lightgun game, like Taito's *Operation Wolf* or SNK's *Mechanized Attack*, where the gun is a light sensor and the screen actually registers its position. Rather, the gun is essentially a fancy joystick where its movements directly control the on-screen sight. And the two guns bolted to the front of the cab are especially fancy. Modelled on the Pulse Rifles from *Aliens*, they're large and reassuringly bulky. And they recoil massively when you pull the trigger,




» [Arcade] Around every corner there's an alien just waiting to bite your head off.

» Perhaps they should have called it *Alien 3: The Guns*? The coin-op is still an impressive sight if you manage to find one in an arcade.

» Proof that the developers had access to the early cut of the film, where the alien bursts out of an ox in the abattoir.

» [Arcade] "Here, even the wind screams." The game nicely captures the colourless landscape of the distant planet.

# THREE TIMES THE TERROR

## LET'S LOOK AT ALIEN 3'S OTHER ADAPTATIONS

» [Game Boy] Don't be put off by the tiny sprites and basic presentation – the GB version is a minor classic that demands a closer look.

The first *Alien 3* game was produced in the UK by Probe Software and released for the Mega Drive in October 1992, six months after the movie. It is a routine platform shooter, spread across 20 labyrinthine stages, where as Ripley, you're tasked with rescuing the prisoners from the aliens – of which there are many. So many. Thankfully, there's plenty of weaponry available to repel them. Overall it's a decent game, spoiled only by the strict time limits that force you to speedrun each stage rather than explore at your own pace. This game forms the basis for the Master System, Game Gear, Commodore 64 and Amiga versions.

The NES also received a conversion of the Mega Drive game, while the other Nintendo platforms earned their own adaptations. The SNES release, another Probe production, is ostensibly similar to the Mega Drive game, but the graphics and animation are better and there's considerably more depth to the gameplay. Ripley now has a variety of non-linear missions to complete and she must use computer terminals to map the facility. This does lead to some backtracking, but it rarely feels as repetitive or as frustrating as the Mega Drive version. The Game Boy version, developed by Bits Studios, surprisingly forgoes platforming in favour of a top-down maze approach in which the emphasis is on exploration and puzzle solving. Largely overlooked on release, this has gained a growing fan base over the years and it's easily the most inventive – and faithful – adaptation of the movie.

» [Mega Drive] The lead Sega version benefits from moody visuals that do a good job of recreating the grimy look of the film.

» [SNES] The sound and graphics are superb on the SNES, helping build a tangible sense of atmosphere as you search the complex.

» [Arcade] Smraedis can easily achieve scores of 19 million or more with a single credit.

# HIGH SCORE Q&A

## EXPERT PLAYER SMRAEDIS REVEALS HOW HE MASTERED THE GAME

**CAN YOU START BY TELLING US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF?**

Hello there, I'm 36 and live in Salford, England. I enjoy playing arcade games and anything difficult appeals the most. I do like a challenge. My favourite genre is lightgun games and I can 1CC [one-credit clear] most of them. I like to visit arcades and leave my name .SM on the high-score tables. You may see it in some arcades.

**WHAT IS YOUR HISTORY WITH *ALIEN 3: THE GUN*? DID YOU PLAY IT IN THE ARCADES, OR MORE RECENTLY VIA EMULATION?**

I played it in the arcades a long time ago, but I couldn't get far at all. I didn't know back then that Stage 2-1 is the most difficult part of the whole game. I started to play the game again on emulation as I was looking at more lightgun games to 1CC and then found that it was possible to get much further.

**DID IT REQUIRE A LOT OF PRACTICE TO COMPLETE THE GAME ON A SINGLE CREDIT?**

Not at all. I got the 1CC in three days of playing, and my highest score – 20,520,000 – a week later. At first I played through and made notes of all the parts I was taking damage, then watched my videos back so I could learn to get the crosshair ready in place for all of the dangerous attacks. It's the best method for clearing difficult lightgun games.

**IS THERE A REASON WHY YOU AVOID PICKING UP THE FLAMETHROWER ON YOUR PLAYTHROUGHS?**

The flamethrower just isn't good in this game. It is only useful at clearing scenery on the first stage, while the standard shot does a better job at taking out enemies.

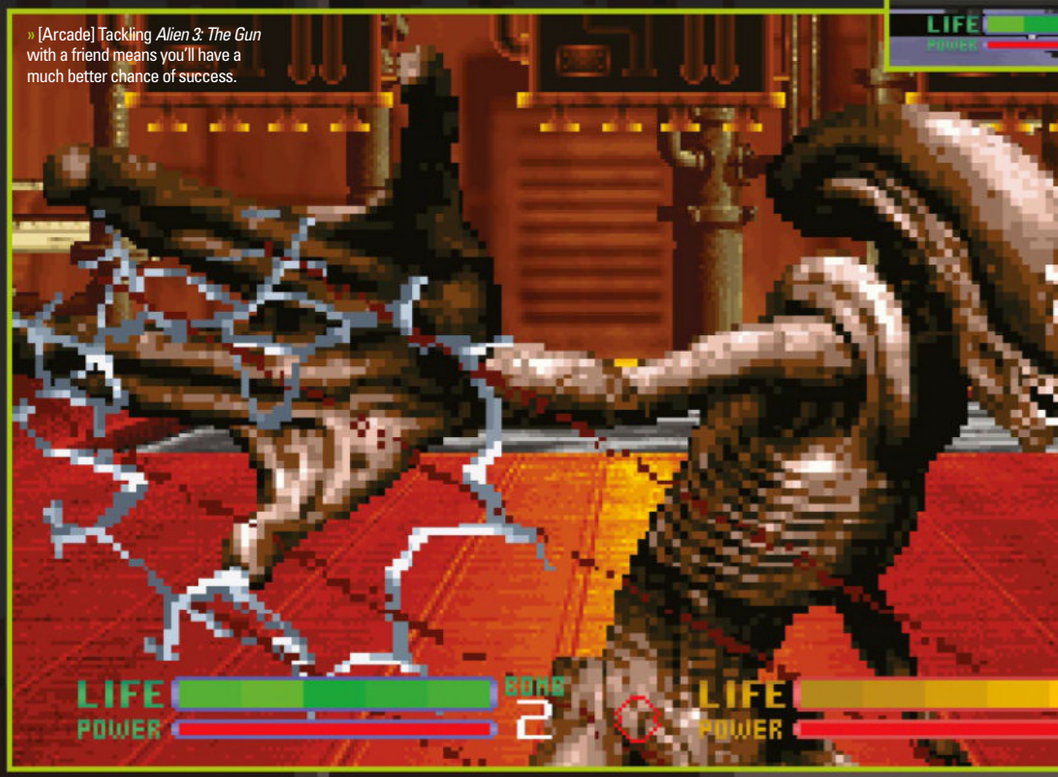
**DO YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE TO IMPROVE ON YOUR HIGHEST SCORE?**

With how the scoring system works, I think it would max out around 20.6 million. The strategy is to shoot everything possible, and to tactically use bombs when there's too much to take out normally, often when there is a lot of destructible scenery. Most enemies score 20k, and the scenery scores 10-20k.

**WHERE WOULD YOU RANK THE GAME IN TERMS OF ARCADE GUN GAMES?**

I think it's a fun challenge to 1CC, and to play once in a while. The graphic effects were amazing for its time, though the lack of a deep scoring system stops it being a true favourite of mine.

» [Arcade] The Japanese version (left) is identical to the world release (right), except that the alien eggs bleed red.




» [Arcade] Tackling *Alien 3: The Gun* with a friend means you'll have a much better chance of success.

# SURVIVING FIORINA

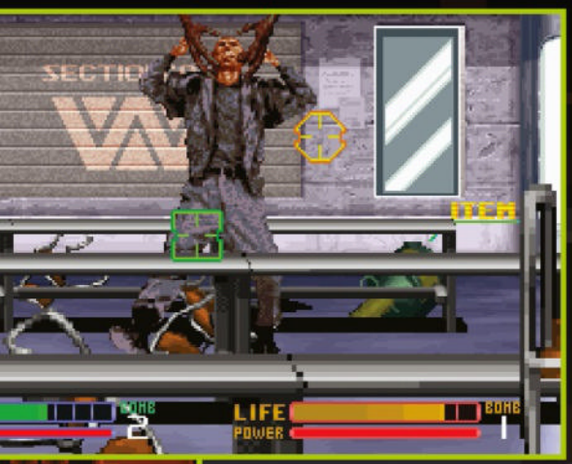
## TIPS TO HELP YOU LIVE LONGER THAN SEVEN SECONDS

## SHOT STRENGTH

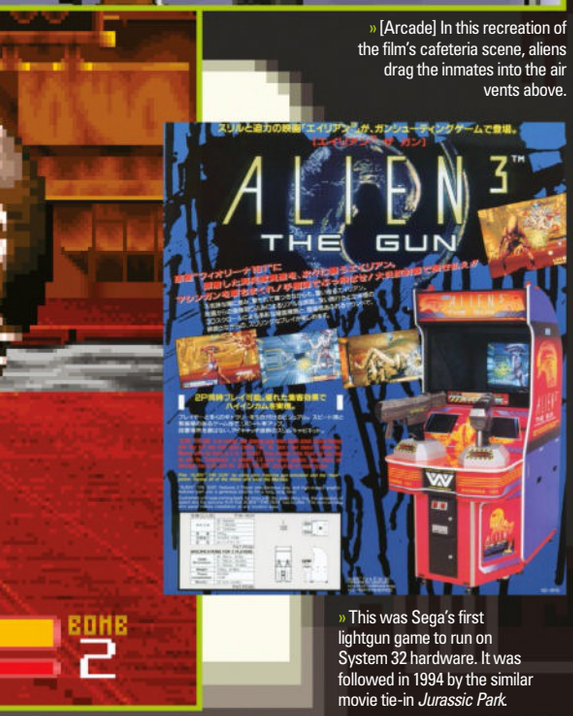
■ Your gun's power becomes crippled if you hold your finger on the fire button too long. In addition, its power subtly decreases as the bar depletes, so for maximum impact it's best to continually hold and release the trigger, firing off quick bursts.

## FIRE HAZARD

■ You may remember that the flamethrower weapon in Konami's *Aliens* arcade game was awesome. Here, not so much. It looks cool, but it's quite poor when it comes to clearing a room. It is good for torching the scenery – that's about it.




» [Arcade] In this recreation of the film's cafeteria scene, aliens drag the inmates into the air vents above.




» This was Sega's first lightgun game to run on System 32 hardware. It was followed in 1994 by the similar movie tie-in *Jurassic Park*.

rattling your arms as shots thud the screen, ripping aliens apart. As per usual, there's a red button on the gun's barrel which you can push to toss a screen-clearing grenade.

**The game plays similarly to Sega's earlier arcade shooter *Line Of Fire*.** The viewpoint continually switches between scrolling sideways and moving into the screen, effectively conveying the impression that you're heading deeper into the hive. The game also simulates the effect of turning through 90 degrees, which works brilliantly here as enemies pop out around every corner. Technically, the main difference over *Line Of Fire* is that the game runs on a later iteration of the Super Scaler hardware – the System 32 board. This 2D powerhouse allows for vastly improved pseudo-3D visuals and a far higher sprite count, allowing aliens to literally swarm the screen. Sprite detail is impressive too, with enemies adopting a more photorealistic look. As with all System 32 games, pin-sharp digital displays don't do the visuals justice – the game really needs to be played on a large CRT, like the 29-inch monitor housed inside the original cab.

We also need to acknowledge the obvious influence of Taito's *Space Gun*. This 1990 coin-op is essentially an unofficial *Aliens* lightgun game, and *Alien 3: The Gun* borrows greedily from it. The main difference is that Taito's game is filled with garishly coloured not-aliens, while Sega's replicates the beautifully bleak visual language of the movie. The game was released in September 1993, 16 months after the movie opened, so Sega was able to view the finished film during development. It's clear the developers also had access to the original shooting script, as the game features plot elements that were later removed from the final theatrical cut. These include the alien's host being Babe the ox rather than Spike the dog, and the presence of a Super Facehugger, a larger type that could implant an embryonic Queen, and appears as the game's first boss. What's particularly fascinating is the original abattoir scene, where the alien bursts out of the ox, is fully replicated in the game – even the pattern of the tiles on the room's wall is identical. This suggests Sega viewed the original Assembly Cut of the film – which is pretty interesting as fans wouldn't be able to watch this version until it was included as a DVD extra in 2003.

**"THE GAME REALLY NEEDS TO BE PLAYED ON A LARGE CRT, LIKE THE 29-INCH MONITOR HOUSED INSIDE THE ORIGINAL CAB"**

## FACE YOUR FEARS

As with any lightgun game, it helps to hit enemies before they get too close. This is particularly true of those annoying, scuttling Facehuggers that infest many areas. Take them out early so you don't have to deal with them jumping all over your mug.

## SHOOT TO KILL

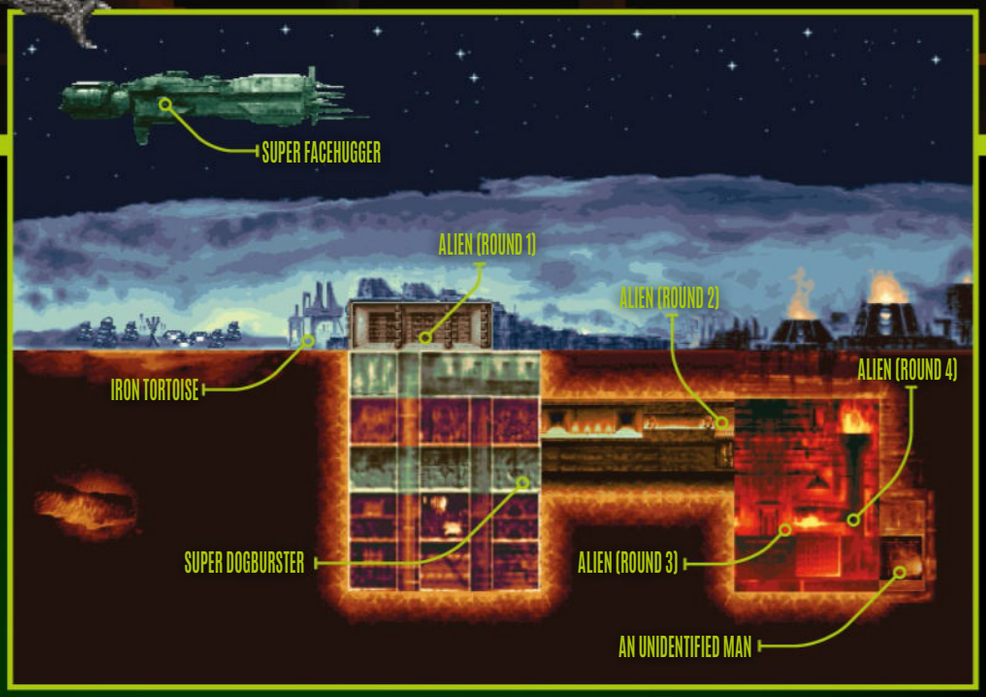
If you're looking to rack up a high score, make sure you properly kill each alien. If you shoot off some limbs and they mosey off-screen, you'll receive zero points. You'll know they're truly dead when their corpses quit flopping around.

## RESCUE MISSION

You're not penalised for shooting the prisoners who run around the facility, but here's the thing – if you let them live by providing safe passage, you'll be rewarded with a small health boost. It's not much, but it can prove vital in the later stages.

# BOSS RUSH

HOW TO BEAT THE GAME'S GUARDIANS AND BE HOME IN TIME FOR TEA



## SUPER FACEHUGGER

■ This oversized critter scuttles around the evacuation vehicle at the end of the first stage and tries to whip you with its tail.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** As with regular Facehuggers, shoot it when it leaps towards you. The best time to damage it is immediately after it attacks. Don't waste any bombs.

## IRON TORTOISE

■ Guarding the prison's exterior is this annoying hulk of metal that doesn't bleed – acid or otherwise. It's the toughest boss in the game.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Target the guns that are flashing to destroy them. When the middle section takes flight, shoot the missiles then refocus on the flashy bits.

## ALIEN (ROUND 1)

■ Your first encounter with the alien boss takes place at the prison entrance, where it runs around wildly trying to claw your face off.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Keep the trigger poised and unload when it briefly pops into view. When it faces you and prepares to pounce, fling a bomb at it.

## SUPER DOGBURSTER

■ This canine-spawned boss is quick on its feet and will spit purple dog vomit at you. It also uses its tail to try and slice you.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** The projectiles are lethal so focus on them first, then hit it hard with your rifle. It's fast but relatively weak, so save your bombs for later.

## ALIEN (ROUND 2)

■ It's back and now it's got two full health bars! First you battle it at the tunnel exit, then the fight moves to the blast furnace.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** This is deceptively easy, as the boss stays on the screen, so it's just a case of holding it in your crosshair and continually firing off quick bursts.

## ALIEN (ROUND 3)

■ It's back to one health bar – only now it's impossible to deplete it! The boss will continually rush you and deliver huge damage with its claws.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** As before, you need to hold it in your sights to prevent it from reaching you. Keep repelling it and eventually it will fall into the furnace pit.

## ALIEN (ROUND 4)

■ The marines exclaim, "Oh shit!" when the boss returns once more and we can sympathise. This is more of a cutscene than a fight though…

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** Follow the on-screen prompt and shoot the water tank above its head. The resulting downpour will destroy the boss once and for all.

## AN UNIDENTIFIED MAN

■ Great boss name. This shady character, presumably Bishop II from the end of the film, is spitting mad that you've wiped out all his aliens.

**HOW TO BEAT THEM:** He evades your shots by rolling and can take lots of damage. Hopefully you held some bombs in reserve as they really help here.

» [Arcade] Protect the humans to receive a health boost. We like to imagine that the Andrews character (played in the film by Brian Glover) pops around and offers the marines a nice cup of Tetley tea.

» [Arcade] Deep in the tunnels, a hapless inmate is about to increase the alien population.

» [Arcade] Fan service. The automated sentry guns from the special edition of *Aliens* make a cameo appearance.

On release *Alien 3: The Gun* earned strong reviews, with the graphics gaining the most attention. US mag *Electronic Gaming Monthly* also praised the horror aspects of the game, which were intensified by the first-person view. "The latest arcade entry from Sega features outstanding graphics which add to the eerie surroundings," began the review in the December 1993 issue. "You will find yourself genuinely startled as aliens come bounding out of their hiding places. You definitely feel as though you're living out this terrifying adventure. This is a wild game, not for the faint of heart."

**"THE CLOSEST WE'VE COME TO A HOME VERSION IS PROBABLY PROBE'S FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER ALIEN TRILOGY"**

**In the UK, *Amiga Action* called the game "stunning" and revealed that its release was rather unexpected.** "Sega has certainly kept its cards close to its chest with this one," wrote Brad Burton. "In true *Alien* style, it has come out of nowhere and I guarantee arcade fans are gonna freak. You've only got to check out the screenshots to realise the quality game you've got here." By the time it appeared, the *Alien 3* film was playing on satellite/cable TV, so it really was a surprise to see this hulking great machine land in the arcades.

Like most System 32 titles, it was rumoured that a Saturn version was in the works, but it sadly never happened. The closest we've come to a home version is probably Probe's first-person shooter *Alien Trilogy*, which features stages set on Fiorina 161. The planet also makes appearances in Rebellion's *Aliens Versus Predator* games and Gearbox's *Aliens: Colonial Marines* – which was published by Sega, coincidentally.

The true legacy of *Alien 3: The Gun* however can be seen in Sega AM1's second lightgun game, 1996's *The House Of The Dead*, which shared some of the same development staff. By swapping aliens for zombies and enhancing the branching path system (which is used effectively but fleetingly in the *Alien 3* game), Sega created an original arcade classic that has become its own franchise. Outside of Sega, the game laid down the template that was later adopted by Play Mechanix for future arcade tie-ins – *Aliens: Extermination* (2006) and *Aliens: Armageddon* (2014).

The *Alien 3* movie has been viewed in a more positive light in recent years, especially following the release of the aforementioned Assembly Cut. We'd argue that *Alien 3: The Gun* does not require reappraisal. It was an excellent game on release and it still hits the bullseye more than 30 years later.

# Salamander

## GIVING THE GENRE SOME LIFE FORCE

» RETROREVIVAL




» PC ENGINE » 1991 » KONAMI

**In the spring of 2007, it felt like the writing was finally on the wall for the Dreamcast.** The fact that my favoured console was still receiving new games at all after being discontinued in 2001 was miraculous, so I could hardly have asked for more, but it did leave me with a problem – supporting the console had made me quite fond of its shoot-'em-ups, which were decidedly unfashionable at the time. Fortunately, around this time I managed to pick up a new old stock PAL TurboGrafx. I'd heard that the system was supposed to be good for shooters, so I grabbed an import adapter and ordered a small stack of Japanese games, of which *Salamander* quickly became a personal favourite.

Fans will know that *Salamander* is related to *Gradius*, which I'd also picked up in the bundle. While I did enjoy *Gradius*, I played *Salamander* more because its power-up system was akin to what I was already used to, and recovering from deaths felt a bit more achievable. That's not to say it was an easy ride, as restarting from checkpoints could be a challenge – and due to my lack of familiarity with the arcade game back then, I didn't realise that challenge was peculiar to the PC Engine version.

The biological theme makes *Salamander*'s first stage particularly memorable, thanks to the giant teeth, the self-healing walls and the giant brain boss. Those cool visuals were enough to ensure that I persevered with the game, and I was rewarded with the spectacular arcing fires of the third stage – another hazard, but an unexpected one that was somehow as visually exciting as any of the polygonal pleasures my Dreamcast had mustered. Never mind that I had very little experience with the console, and that I was arguably doing it all wrong by playing at 50Hz. Whatever the future held, I knew that by looking backwards, I'd have my fix of the genre for years to come.

# STUDIO PROFILE: Animation

While today mostly remembered for its Zelda and Link CD-i games, Animation Magic was a Russian-American company that worked with several well-known developers such as Blizzard and Sierra. Unfortunately, its results were not always up to scratch…

**WORDS BY DAMIANO GERLI**

» [CD-i] Link seems definitely ready to go in *Faces Of Evil*, too bad it "sure is boring around here".

» [CD-i] Despite the cutscenes being a little iffy, the background graphics of *Faces Of Evil* are still quite beautiful.

**The history of Animation Magic feels like that moment in *Rocky IV* when a tired and beat up Sylvester Stallone proudly announced the end of the frictions between the USA and USSR by screaming, "Everyone can change!"** But, well, that was a few years before the actual end of the Cold War; the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the USSR in 1992, but never mind. All those history-changing events seemed to immerse the world into a (long-lost) optimism for the future, and also probably influenced the creation of Animation Magic.

Animation Magic was originally a multimedia company, founded in 1992 by the late Dale DeSharone, under his own name, who sadly passed away in 2008. He had been working at Spinnaker Software, designing, programming and writing the editing tools and engines for its Philips CD-i games. As he recalls, in an interview with John Szczepaniak from 2006 published on the Hardcore Gaming 101 blog, "I had originally planned to be at Spinnaker only one year, as Philips was planning to release the machine in 1988. Then one year turned into four, due to constant delays, I think the launch was closer to 1991."

In the end, with the machine's limitations being very evident and CD technology being more and more veered towards PC and Mac, Dale mentioned Philips did not feel the console was made for games and noticed "a subtle hostility" towards the medium. The company came about also thanks to funding from AIM (American Interactive Media, Philips' American publishing company), with most of the previous team from Spinnaker joining as well. Igor Razboff, Dale DeSharone's partner, explains. "We had actors, writers, game designers, audio engineers, composers, artists and animators on staff in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The entire staff at the time was around 12 people, so there were not a lot of us. Actors were hired on a project basis when voices were needed."

And that is how the first big job for Animation Magic came about, through the same Dutch company. "Philips was comfortable working with Dale and that is how we got the Nintendo deal. They had an agreement to licence five characters from Nintendo, from what I recall," explains Igor. Animation Magic pitched that it could maximise the quality by developing a single engine to be used with both games. But with a small full-time staff, at the time, Igor mentions that the company was definitely cutting it close to be working on two games at the same time. The games were also going to be both launched on the same day, 10 October 1993.

To make matters worse, Philips mentioned that, somehow, in the budget of the games it

## GAMES TO DISCOVER

**ZELDA: WAND OF GAMELON**
**PHILIPS CD-I, 1993**
■ The first game developed by Animation Magic, notorious today for its quirky animated cutscenes.

**LINK: FACES OF EVIL**
**PHILIPS CD-I, 1993**
■ Released the same day as *Wand Of Gamelon*, it featured the same engine and similar animated cutscenes.

**KING'S QUEST VII: THE PRINCELESS BRIDE**
**PC, 1994**
■ While Sierra handled the puzzles and story, all the graphics in Chapter 1 were directed by Animation Magic.

**IM MEEN**
**PC, 1995**
■ A sort of simplified first-person dungeon crawler made for kids, where you have to defeat an evil wizard and all of his strange creatures.

**CHILL MANOR**
**PC, 1996**
■ Sequel to *IM Meen*, it featured pages with missing words or incorrect history facts for the children to find in order to progress in the game.

# MAGIC

> "Philips was comfortable working with Dale and that is how we got the Nintendo deal. They had an agreement to licence five characters from Nintendo, from what I recall"
> **Igor Razboff**

» [CD-i] Touching rupees in *Wand Of Gamelon* is not enough, you'll have to stab them to pick them up.

» [CD-i] The King wonders what can they do to help against Ganon.

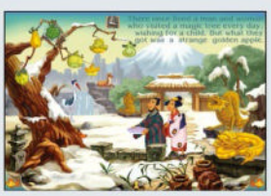
» [CD-i] Prepare to see this screen quite often as dying is a very common occurrence in *Faces Of Evil*.

wanted to include computer animation. And that is how Dale DeSharone met Igor Razboff. Igor had been living in the United States since 1982, and remembers meeting his future partner through a mutual friend. "Dale told me about his work with Animation Magic and the small budget they were working with, so he asked me, 'Why don't we start hiring animators and artists in Russia? We could work with much less money, and there is an abundance of talent.' Since I was born in St Petersburg, of course I could be the perfect man to hire people there without any language barriers," says Igor.

**The result of that meeting was the creation of the actual Animation Magic, as a joint venture between Russia and the United States.** First, the company hired eight new artists in Russia and brought them to Cambridge for a training session. "We shipped several people to the US and provided them with the CD-i, computers and scanners," continues Igor. The studio then founded a subsidiary in St Petersburg so that, thanks to this brilliant cost-cutting idea, Animation Magic grew rapidly to a staff of around 120 people, all focussed on animation, artwork and game engine.

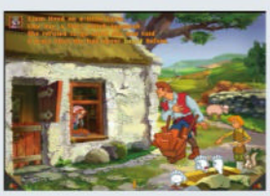
Interestingly, Ivor explains that the deal between Philips and Nintendo seemed to not include much control from Japan. "As far as the deal went, the Japanese company had very little involvement. Philips was supervising every step of the work, while Animation Magic had the task of fully producing and developing the two games. Nintendo had very little input, beyond looking at the sketch of the characters and suggesting changes." Dale DeSharone ▶

**MAGIC TALES: IMO & THE KING**
**PC, 1995**
■ The *Magic Tales* series are fairy tales. *Imo* is based on several traditional stories from Africa.

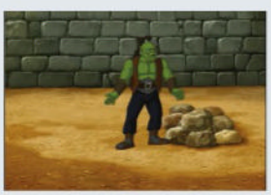


**MAGIC TALES: THE LITTLE SAMURAI**
**PC, 1995**
■ With the usual Grandpa Mouse framework, this is the Japanese tale known as *Issun-boshi*.

**MAGIC TALES: BABA YAGA & THE MAGIC GEESE**
**PC, 1995**
■ Grandpa Mouse tells his nephews the story of Tasha and the witch Baba Yaga.



**MAGIC TALES: LIAM FINDS A STORY**
**PC, 1996**
■ A witch visits a kid who has to tell her a story that she has never heard before to force her to leave.



**WARCRAFT ADVENTURES: LORD OF THE CLANS**
**PC, [UNRELEASED]**
■ While never released, *Warcraft Adventures* still found its way to the internet several years later.

» [PC] The storyteller does not seem able to help Liam in finding a story that the witch does not know.

Liam lived on a little farm.
One day a fairy witch appeared.
She refused to go until she was told
a story that she had never heard before.

▶ also mentioned in that earlier interview how there was a lot of creative freedom at the time, since, "Those famous characters, at the time, could only really be seen on the game boxes, you did not have much else to work with."

Along with a single release date for both games, the deadline was pretty strict as all work on *Link: The Faces Of Evil* and *Zelda: Wand Of Gamelon* was completed in little more than 12 months of development, but Igor recalls that it was even shorter than that, at about nine months. With the cutscenes of the game being produced by the team in Russia, everything else was done in the Cambridge office of Animation Magic.

Some of the people hired in the St Petersburg office mention that working in Animation Magic was anything but fun. Russian animator Denis Chernov, who worked on the two *Zelda* games, mentions, "[It] was like a prison with ridiculous demands and sanctions, such as not wearing shorts during the summer, marking the exact minutes of arrival and departure from work. All this very badly affected the creative environment we were working in."

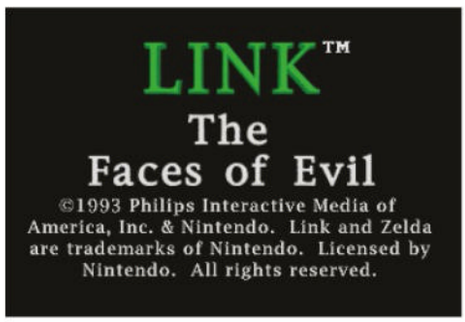
**Despite criticisms towards the games, and a notorious resurgence of the cutscene in the YouTube era around 2006, Igor, on the business side of things, mentions that Philips seemed pretty happy with the results.** "I would say they were quite happy to continue working with us, since we later published more than 20 additional titles for Philips as part of Capitol Multimedia." Indeed, the year after the release of the two CD-i games, in 1994, Animation Magic was acquired by Capitol Multimedia Inc. Igor mentions it as "a very good deal" as it was a publicly traded company that was 25% owned by Philips at the time of purchase.

Around this time, Animation Magic produced several games aimed at kids for Windows 3.1 and DOS platforms, such as *Gregory And The Hot Air Balloon* and *Magic Tales*. The *Magic Tales* series included six different titles, published by Davidson & Associates Inc, and Igor says, "The budget for them was about $450,000 for each title, if I remember correctly." In 1994, it was also employed by Sierra On-line to produce the animation for *King's Quest VII: The Princeless Bride*. But that was not the end of Animation Magic working with American companies on important games, as next in line was Blizzard.

In 1996, Blizzard was considering branching out its style of games and doing something with its *Warcraft* series outside the classic real-time strategy gameplay. That is how it contacted Animation Magic to work on a possible point-and-click graphical adventure in the world of *Warcraft*. Igor mentions that, "It was Animation Magic's final big project, everyone was very excited and we were working very closely with Blizzard on it.

## THE DNA OF ANIMATION MAGIC

THE ELEMENTS THAT DEFINED THE STUDIO


LINK™
The
Faces of Evil
©1993 Philips Interactive Media of America, Inc. & Nintendo. Link and Zelda are trademarks of Nintendo. Licensed by Nintendo. All rights reserved.

### STARTING WITH A BANG

■ Animation Magic first cut its teeth working with Philips, or rather the American publishing branch of the company, for two games starring Nintendo characters, Link and Zelda. For several reasons, these games were not up to the quality that players were used to.

### QUIRKY CUTSCENES

■ While they became a meme in the Noughties in the early YouTube era, it is fair to say that Animation Magic's style of cutscenes did improve over time, with *Warcraft Adventures* looking quite beautiful compared to the limitations of the Philips CD-i.

### LIMITED BUDGETS

■ The two Nintendo Philips CD-i games were developed for little over 800,000 dollars, using the same engine, and in the space of a few months on a console that was not technically proficient enough for side-scrolling titles.

Almost the entirety of the project was developed in St Petersburg." While Blizzard seemed really excited about the prospect of working with Animation Magic, it seemed to be really not familiar with the overall process of developing an adventure game.

> "It was Animation Magic's final big project, everyone was very excited and we were working very closely with Blizzard on it"
> **Igor Razboff**

Work on the adventure game commenced, apparently, a few months after the release of *Warcraft II: Beyond The Dark Portal*. It was finally announced to the public in mid-March 1997, with a slated release of a few months later, in Autumn 1997. *Lord Of The Clans* would have included about sixty locations within seven regions of Azeroth, classic adventure game puzzles, over seventy animated characters (with many returning faces from *Warcraft I* and *II*) and twenty minutes of fully animated cutscenes. The game was supposed to tell the origin story of Thrall, a new character in the *Warcraft* universe, who would come back in both *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* and *World Of Warcraft*.

**Blizzard envisioned *Adventures* as the first game in a possible series of story-based *Warcraft* spin-offs in the adventure genre.** While it was originally announced for a release in late-1997, *Lord Of The Clans* would be pushed back almost a full year. In quarter four of 1998 Blizzard mentioned a slew of technical problems causing the delay, along with communication problems with Animation Magic.

Apparently, despite several visits by Blizzard to the St Petersburg office, as remembered by Ivan, the two companies did not see eye to eye on how the project was supposed to be shaping up. Animation Magic was used to first working on the story and then designing the surrounding gameplay, which was not Blizzard's way. The distance between the teams working on *Warcraft Adventures* made the process even more challenging.

Blizzard also ended up buying the St Petersburg studio, as Igor recalls. "We were bought out by Cendant Software, which owned Blizzard Entertainment and Knowledge Adventure. We then continued to work with them, as part of Cendant." But it was in May 1998 that the adventure was cancelled for good. "We were close to the planned release, but Blizzard's management decided that the adventure genre was not as exciting as their core games and could not produce the same sales numbers. Therefore, the project was shelved," Igor explains.

A couple of years later, Animation Magic was finally dissolved as part of the French company Havas restructuring, at the end of 2001. As Dale himself put it to Hardcore Gaming 101, despite Animation Magic often being remembered for some of the worst *Zelda* games, "Every game has its story that is worth telling." The company brought up by Dale and Igor would still go down in history as one unique experiment in gaming development. ✱

» [CD-i] In *IM Meen* you get the choice of two different characters, but the story does not change regardless.

» [PC] Despite the look, these guys are not there to talk with us but to fight us to the death instead.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER ANIMATION MAGIC?

### DALE DESHARONE

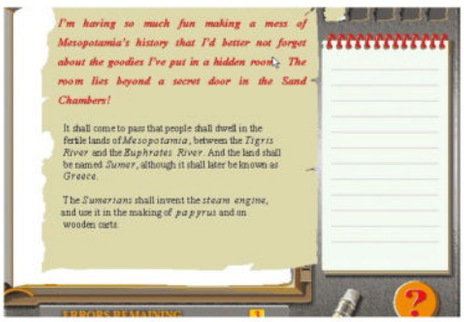
Dale started creating games for his students, as a schoolteacher. After winning several prizes, he started developing software and games full-time. He was behind Commodore 64 titles such as *Alice In Wonderland*, and *Below The Root*. Along with the CD-i, he also worked on GameCube and PlayStation games. He sadly passed away in 2008 after a long bout with leukaemia.

### IGOR RAZBOFF

Igor was born in St Petersburg and has a Master's degree and PhD in pure mathematics from the University Of St Petersburg. He has been living in the United States since 1982 and, after Animation Magic was dissolved, he founded Scoros in 2004, a Florida company specialising in IT services. He is currently the chairman of Scoros Inc.

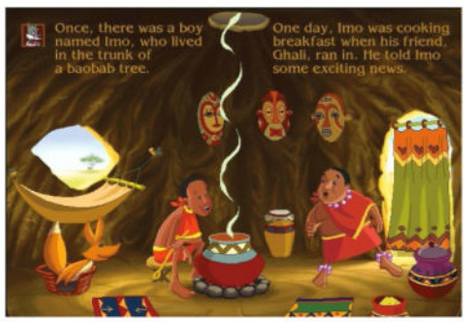
### DENIS CHERNOV

Born in St Petersburg in 1970, Denis Chernov has worked as an animator on both the *Legend Of Zelda* titles developed by Animation Magic. Since then, he has been known internationally as the director of children's animated movies such as the *Kikoriki* series and *Teddy Boom!*. Most recently, in 2023, he directed *Smeshariki Snimayut Kino*.


I'm having so much fun making a mess of Mesopotamia's history that I'd better not forget about the goodies I've put in a hidden room. The room lies beyond a secret door in the Sand Chambers!
It shall come to pass that people shall dwell in the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, between the Tigris River and the Euphrates River. And the land shall be named Sumer, although it shall later be known as Greece.
The Sumerians shall invent the steam engine, and use it in the making of papyrus and on wooden carts.

### THE CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE

■ After 1995 Animation Magic, then having been acquired by Capitol Multimedia, went all in developing educational and children's games such as the *Magic Tales* series and the *IM Meen* series.


Once, there was a boy named Imo, who lived in the trunk of a baobab tree.
One day, Imo was cooking breakfast when his friend, Ghali, ran in. He told Imo some exciting news.

### OUTSOURCING WORK

■ While Animation Magic first saw life as a US-based company founded by Dale DeSharone, the name identified an American-Russian enterprise which used animators and designers working from St Petersburg and programmers based in Cambridge (Massachusetts).

# Hardware Heaven

# Zodiac

» **MANUFACTURER:** Tapwave » **YEAR:** 2003
» **COST:** £299.99 (launch), £300+ (today, boxed), £100+ (today, unboxed)

**In the handheld market of the early Noughties, the Game Boy Advance was essentially competing in a one-horse race.** Undeterred by Nintendo's dominance, the ambitious California-based company Tapwave felt that it could differentiate itself by targeting an adult audience with a more expensive, more capable device. As well as offering full 3D games, the Zodiac featured full PalmOS PDA functionality as well as music and video playback capabilities. The system launched via online direct sales in October 2003, with games including *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* and *Duke Nukem Mobile*, and the likes of *Tomb Raider* on the way.

Reviews were generally positive about the Zodiac hardware, praising its gaming power, ease of use and versatility. However, the system was slow to enter retail channels and faced stiff competition from companies with more resources – it launched in the same month as the N-Gage, Nokia's console-phone hybrid, and anticipation was high for both the Nintendo DS and Sony's PlayStation Portable in 2004. With players and developers alike backing other systems, Tapwave chose to withdraw from the now-crowded market in the summer of 2005. *

## ESSENTIAL GAME

### SpyHunter

Relatively few games were made for the Zodiac, fewer that demonstrated its ability with 3D graphics and fewer still that were given physical releases. If you want a game that does all that, *SpyHunter* is your top option. The game is an adaptation of the 2001 series reboot that originated on the PS2, and features all the usual fun with transforming vehicles and weaponry. There's a Mission mode set over seven stages as well as an Arcade mode that is closer in style to the Eighties hit.

## Zodiac fact

■ The model shown here is a Zodiac 2. The Zodiac 1 was released simultaneously with the Zodiac 2, for a lower price, and has less RAM. It can be distinguished by its lighter grey colour scheme.

**PROCESSOR:** 32-BIT MOTOROLA I.MX1 ARM9 CPU (200 MHZ),
**NETWORKING:** BLUETOOTH, WIFI (OPTIONAL VIA SDIO CARD)
**BATTERY:** 1540MAH RECHARGEABLE LITHIUM BATTERY
**AUDIO:** YAMAHA AUDIO COMPONENT, STEREO OUTPUT
**DISPLAY:** 3.8 INCH BACKLIT TRANSFLECTIVE LCD TOUCHSCREEN, 480X320 RESOLUTION
**GRAPHICS:** ATI IMAGEON W4200 2D GRAPHICS ACCELERATOR, X-FORGE SOFTWARE 3D
**RAM:** 32MB (ZODIAC 1), 128MB (ZODIAC 2)
**OPERATING SYSTEM:** PALMOS 5
**STORAGE:** MMC/SD CARD

SUPPLIED BY
**EVAN AMOS**

# OLD SCHOOL RALLY

## IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ASTROLABE GAMES
» **DEVELOPER:** FROZEN LAKE GAMES
» **RELEASE:** SUMMER 2024
» **PLATFORM:** PC, CONSOLES POSSIBLE
» **GENRE:** ARCADE RACING

DID YOU LOVE COLIN MCRAE RALLY BACK IN THE DAY? DO YOU HAVE THE FONDEST MEMORIES OF SCREAMER 2? DOES THE THOUGHT OF SEGA RALLY GIVE YOU A WARM AND FUZZY FEELING? THEN OLD SCHOOL RALLY WILL THOROUGHLY TICKLE YOUR FANCY

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

» Sakis Rogkas is the sole developer of *Old School Rally*. He is 34 years old, lives in Greece and has been making games for almost 20 years now.

**We really can't complain about a lack of excellent racing games at the moment: the new *Forza Motorsport* leaves nothing to be desired, while games such as *F1 23*, *GRID Legends*, *Dirt Rally 2* and *Assetto Corsa Competizione* cater for every virtual racing need, no matter how unusual.** But there's a group of gamers out there who don't need precisely ray-traced rubber on the road, don't care about hours of tuning, and just want to hit Main Menu, Arcade Mode, Start. For exactly these people there are games like *Old School Rally*.

"I am a big fan of the driving games on [the original] PlayStation" says Sakis Rogkas, *Old School Rally*'s sole developer. "They had a charm that no other console can reproduce, not only in terms of the unique visuals, but also for the fun factor of the gameplay that most of those games had. I took inspiration from many games for *Old School Rally*, including *Colin McRae Rally*, *Need For Speed*, *Gran Turismo* and *V-Rally*, to name but a few."

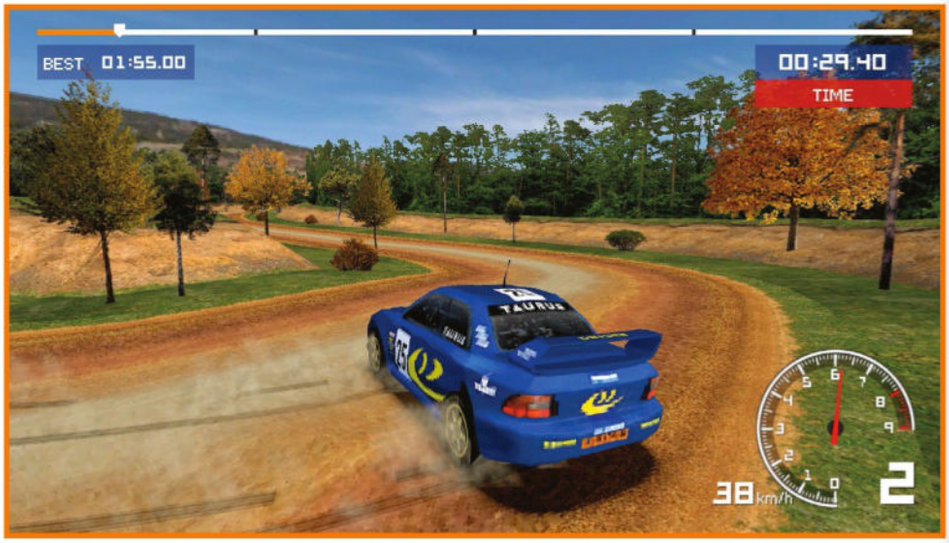
Sakis is 34 years old, lives in Athens, Greece and is a software developer by day. By night, he continues to code and has been doing so since 2005. "I started when I saw in a magazine that I could make my own games with a program called Game Maker," we're told. "That's when I found out how much I liked making games, which led to creations like *Crimelife*, *Guns And Spurs* and *Mythology*. Later, while looking for other ways to improve my knowledge of 3D games, I found out about Unity and it opened up a whole new world for me. I've made several games over the years and people have liked my work. Some of them even made it to consoles, like *Guns And Spurs 2*, which was physically released on Nintendo Switch. I grew up with Nintendo as a kid, so as you can imagine, after it was released on Switch, it was crazy for me to hold a game I'd made in a physical format."

The first PlayStation holds a very special place in Sakis' heart, and he really wanted to create his own game in the typical PlayStation style of the Nineties. "I think that was something that was missing from today's driving games," he explains. "Most of the indie games with PS1-style visuals were horror games, all repeating the same formula. Driving games were few and far between, especially

» [PC] Crashing into obstacles will deform your car. Currently, these collisions only have visual consequences.

» [PC] The optional CRT filter adds Nineties authenticity.

» [PC] There are lots of different locations to drive through, including Finland, Australia and Japan.




» [PC] Drifting is extremely important: The better you slide through corners, the faster you will be.

rally games. *Old School Rally* aims to provide an authentic retro rally game experience. I'm a huge fan of that era of rally games, the PS1 had so many great titles that are still a joy to play today." The whole project started just over a year ago. "It all began as a fun project, mainly to see and experiment with how the limitations of the PS1 would work on a modern game engine," Sakis says. "But people liked the results, so I decided to take it more seriously and turn it into a real game."

**As soon as you boot up *Old School Rally*, its origins become clear, as even the main menu, with its shiny, rotating 3D objects, is strongly reminiscent of the mid-Nineties.** As soon as the game itself starts, you immediately feel transported back to a time when pixels were big and the Spice Girls were playing on every radio station. *Old School Rally* features roughly carved car models with low-res textures and straight lines, while simple 2D sprites such as trees, houses, people, hot-air balloons and even a snowman, line the game's challenging tracks as roadside decorations. There are pixelated photographs as backgrounds and wobbly floor textures that make you immediately feel the weight of the DualShock in your hands again in your head.

Dithering effects evoke memories of a time before TrueColor, the simple damage model produces dented doors and smoking engines after collisions, an optional CRT filter bends the image slightly in the style of an old TV set, and there is no texture filtering whatsoever, neither on the cars, nor on the track, which makes the pixels appropriately ginormous. In other words, if you set aside the high-resolution and widescreen display, *Old School Rally* really looks like a game that could have been released in the mid to late-Nineties.

Of course, it's not enough just to look dated to pass as an old-school racer – the gameplay also has to fit, blending the accessibility of an arcade racer with the complexity of a simulation and spicing it all up with a dash of special sauce. And you can tell that *Old School Rally*'s creator has spent a lot of time with the first *Colin McRae Rally*, because he has really got the controls down – the driving model has a physical heft ▶

## THE OLDER SCHOOL

### Two key games that inspired Old School Rally

■ According to Sakis, the main inspiration for *Old School Rally* was the 1998 *Colin McRae Rally*. No big surprise, as it was a landmark title featuring real cars, real rallies and a very real rally champion namesake (who sadly passed away in 2007). Combining the accessibility of a typical arcade racer with life-like controls, physics and real-time car damage, *Colin McRae Rally* ushered in a new age of realistic racing simulations with a strong arcade flavour. It was a huge success and the beginning of one of the greatest racing series in the world of videogames. You can read about its creation in **Retro Gamer** 43.

Another major inspiration came from the 1994 *Sega Rally Championship*, which made its way to European Saturn consoles a year later and was then ported to other systems. This is a pure arcade racing experience with real car licences, fantastic graphics that defined the look of racing games for years to come, and great controls that make the game easy to learn but hard to master. You can read more about its history in issue 152.

Both games had a huge influence on Sakis' game, "They were great examples of how to design the tracks and the graphics in general with all the limitations of the time".

# THE ROOT OF ALL DRIVING

## The practice round for Old School Rally

■ *Seaside Driving* began as a mobile game for Android systems in 2019, before being ported to PC (2022) and Switch (2023). The gameplay is very simple – your car accelerates automatically, and all you have to do is keep it on the endless track for as long as possible before it crashes into some kind of obstacle. The coins you collect along the way allow you to unlock new cars and more tracks. It's not a particularly deep game, and its controls could surely be whacked with a precision stick once or twice. But it's an interesting take on the endless runner genre, and it features a smooth Eighties-style synth soundtrack.

Barebones though it may be, *Seaside Driving* laid the foundations for *Old School Rally*, as Sakis confirms. "I learned a lot from it, but of course *Old School Rally* is a completely different game, made from scratch as a console game, so everything had to be designed with that in mind. Like the menu navigation, the interactions and the gameplay in general."

» [PC] Not every race takes place in sunshine. You also drive at night, and through rain and snow.

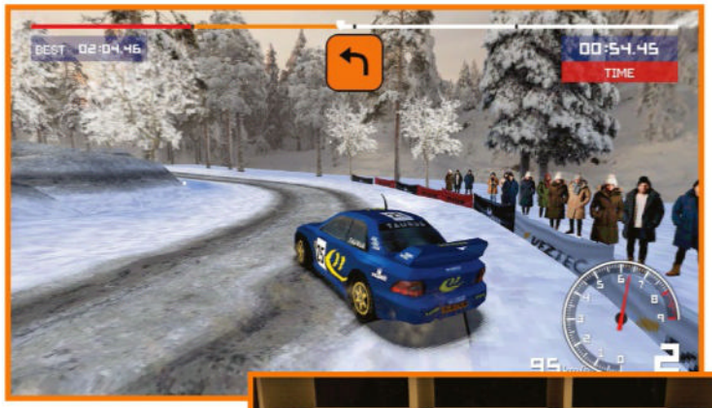
▶ to it that takes some getting used to, and it's less arcade-y than you might think. You have to be very careful with the throttle and brakes to avoid flying out of every bend, but after a while you get into a very comfortable flow that allows you to slide around most corners elegantly. "Gameplay is extremely important in that type of game," says Sakis, "It has to be an enjoyable experience for all players, even those who don't have much experience with driving games. So the general feeling of driving is a mix of semi-realistic and arcade-style gameplay. It was quite difficult to find the right balance between the two, but I think I managed it."

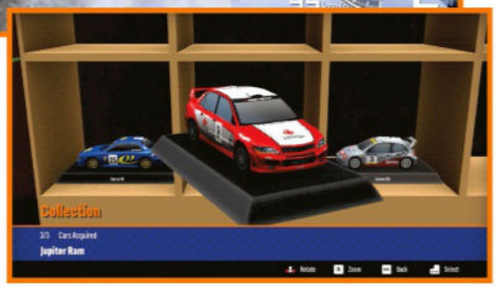
**Of course, you have to be careful not to crash into every tree in the area while you're speeding along happily.** Collisions not only damage the outside of the car, they also cause internal problems, as Sakis explains. "The damage affects the performance of the car. If your car is completely beat up, you will probably never make it to the finish line in time. This is very important in Rally mode, but you will be able to repair your car between every other stage."

Speaking of cars, the full game will feature at least 16 of them, varying not only in appearance but also in acceleration, top speed, handling and braking. As *Old School Rally* is an indie project led by a single developer,

» [PC] The final game will feature at least 16 different cars, all inspired by real-world models.

» [PC] Objects on the road are simple 2D sprites.




» [PC] Aren't they cute? Your collected cars are proudly displayed like precious little toys.

there are no real car brands in it, that would be far too expensive, but you can clearly see which real-world machines they are based on. It doesn't take much imagination to spot a Subaru Impreza, Mitsubishi Lancer, Mini Cooper S Rally, Toyota Celica and a Peugeot 206 WRC in the fleet – which are named Taurus RS, Jupiter Ram and Lionne D26 here. The entire set is collected over the course of a rally career, and the way the cars are presented in *Old School Rally* makes you giggle with delight. All the wheels are displayed as cute little models on pedestals in a display cabinet, and can be viewed individually up close. So cute, it's as if they've just hatched from a Kinder Surprise egg.

Over the course of the entire rally, you will drive on at least 13 tracks, including Sweden, Finland, Australia and Japan, on streets, snow, ice and, of course, off-road, as well as during the day, at night, in the rain and in the snow. The usual rally challenges await you, such as hairpin bends, jumps, water obstacles and bridges, all of which you are warned of by clearly displayed information signs and your co-driver's voice. Each route is divided into sections with standard times to beat, and records can be shared with the world in online leaderboards. In classic rally fashion, however, you will always be driving alone.

**One of *Old School Rally*'s most unusual features is that Sakis does almost everything himself.** The music, like the pumping menu theme, comes from within the community – but he takes care of everything else himself. "I work on this game alone. I do the coding, some 3D models and the track design. Other game assets such as 3D models come from various stores, but most of the time I have to edit them to give them a Playstation look. It takes a lot of time and effort, but the result is a game that looks and feels like it was originally made for that console. I use Unity as the game engine, with lots of custom tools for designing the rally tracks and custom shaders for the PS1 aesthetic and visuals. [I use] other tools like Blender for the 3D models, Photoshop for the textures and Audacity for the sound effects."

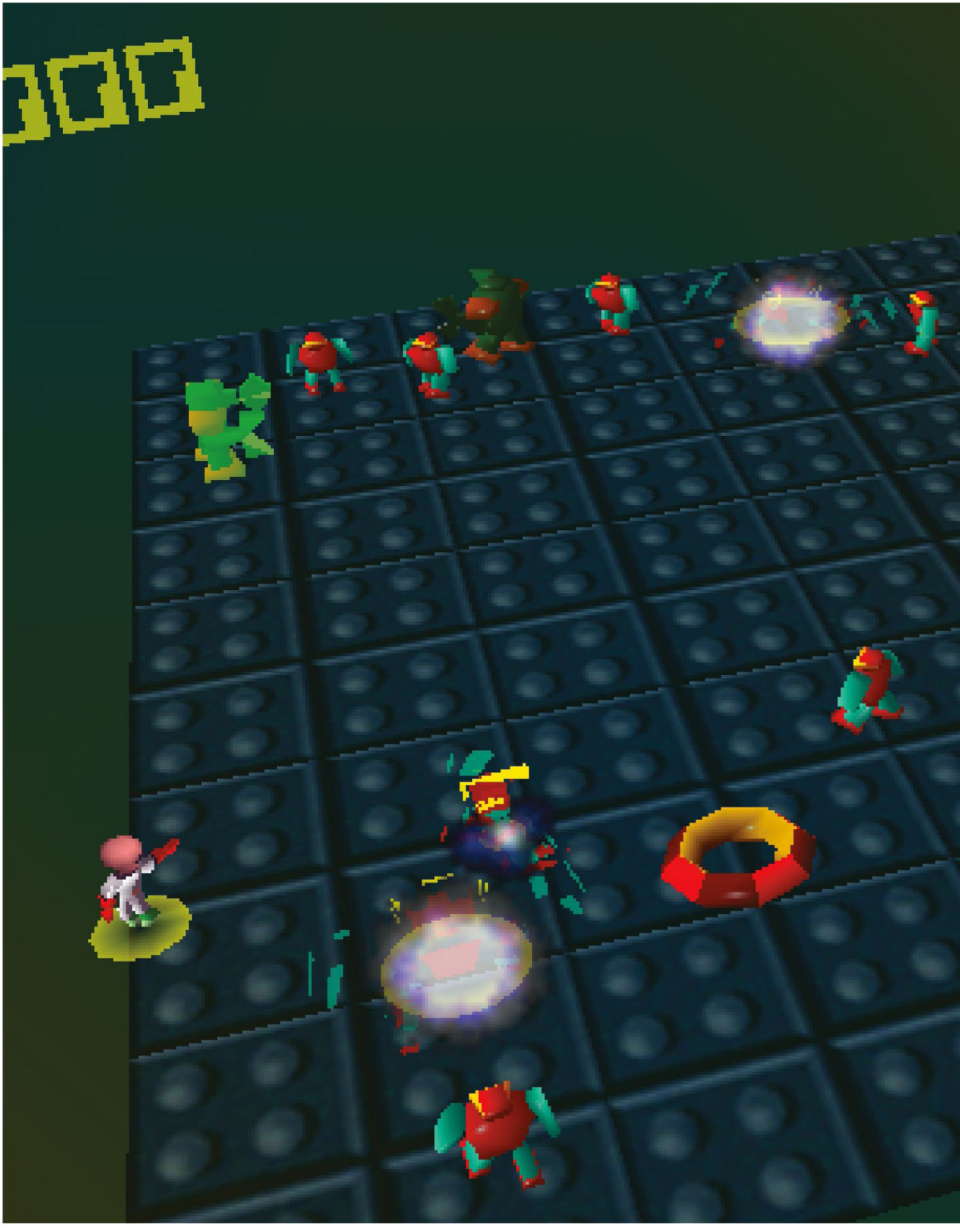
But his most important tool is… paper. "I always try to put everything down on paper first, even when designing a rally stage I used to draw the track on paper," he explains. "I take inspiration from popular rally tracks and global landmarks, but I'm not limited to what they actually look like, everything is custom made, so I keep some basic details and start from there."

*Old School Rally* is currently in Early Access on Steam, with an official release planned for 2024. Right now, Sakis is collecting user feedback, which means that some things in the game could still change – most notably the number of cars and tracks, but also thousands of little things in the game's balance. *Old School Rally* will be distributed by Astrolabe Games – initially only on PC, but Sakis says that console versions are possible at a later date.

Fingers crossed. Even in its early stage, *Old School Rally* is wonderfully, well, old school, bringing back memories of *V-Rally* and *Colin McRae Rally* from the first minute of play. Of course, the final version will have to prove that there is true meat in it in the long run. But what is there is lovingly made, the work of a true enthusiast – and a love letter to the golden era of arcade racers!

» [PC] Playability is spot on, *Old School Racer* feels like it belongs on the first PlayStation.

» [PC] As you race, your car gets dirtier and dirtier.



# Robotron 64

## EASY DOES IT

» NINTENDO 64 » 1998 » PLAYER1

**During lockdown, I found several ways to keep myself distracted from the threat of COVID-19.** One was going for daily walks with my family in our local park, the other was building an N64 collection.

The vast majority of games that were on my radar were mostly those that I had owned before selling my console in 1999, due to the incoming arrival of Emily, my first daughter. But as is often the case, I also made a list of games that had come out after I sold my console, as well as the ones that I had missed when I first owned the system. One of those games was *Robotron 64* and it took absolutely ages for me to buy a copy because I could never find one at a price I was willing to pay.

I'm glad I waited, because while it's a fun update to the arcade original, it does have one rather significant issue – it's way too easy for its own good. The early levels offer virtually no challenge at all and it's possible to sleepwalk through them. When you consider how frantic and chaotic the original game was this is something of a disappointment. It does get more frenetic later on, but this doesn't happen until you're on level 30 or so, which is a fair while into the game.

It's a shame that there's so little challenge to Player1's game, because I do genuinely like how it feels to play. You've got 3D versions of the many different enemies that made the original arcade game so challenging, there's a decent range of power-ups, a huge number of levels to tackle and you can choose to play using the analogue sticks of two controllers for a more authentic experience. I even like the funky techno-style music that accompanies the action.

I'm certainly not planning to get rid of my copy of *Robotron 64*, but it is a shame that you've got to experience a fair amount of monotony before you get to the same genuinely thrilling action that made me fall in love with the arcade original.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

# WAVE RACE 64

*WITH ITS VIBRANT AESTHETIC AND EFFERVESCENT SOUNDTRACK FULL OF CATCHY TUNES, WAVE RACE 64 EMBODIES MUCH OF WHAT MADE NINTENDO'S FIRST 3D CONSOLE (AND THE NINETIES) SO GREAT. HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NINTENDO'S WATERY RACER, AND WHY IT'S STILL WORTH PLAYING TODAY*

***WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO***

» [Nintendo 64] Dolphin Park is where we get our first taste of the good life – jet skis and a cool breeze.

» [Nintendo 64] In some courses, an ebbing tide reveals previously submerged obstacles.

**Shoshinkai is a Japanese word which literally means 'beginning party'.** From 1989 until 1996, it was also the name of a three-day-long videogame tradeshow hosted by Nintendo, during which the company would showcase its new and upcoming products to a ravenous press and public.

The seventh Shoshinkai, held in November of 1995, was a big one. Nintendo's first ever 3D console, codenamed Ultra 64, was publicly revealed as the Nintendo 64, and two of the new console's games, *Super Mario 64* and *Kirby Ball 64*, were available as playable prototypes. In addition, eleven other of the new console's early games were shown in a three-minute-long prerecorded sizzle reel.

Squeezed in amongst such future-iconic games as *Mario Kart 64* and *GoldenEye 007*, *Star Fox 64* and *Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire* was a less immediately exciting title; a water-based boat-racing game called *Wave Race 64*.

The sizzle reel showed *Wave Race 64* as a by-the-book racing game in which transformable boats sped through tubular tracks and flooded industrial speedways. *Maximum* magazine described the game as "*F-Zero* on water" and based on the ten seconds of *Wave Race 64* on display in 1995, that description wasn't far off. At the time, no one knew just what *Wave Race 64* would become. Not even the people making it.

According to issue 3 of *Maximum*, *Wave Race 64*'s producer Shigeru Miyamoto, game director Shinya Takahashi, and their team were struggling to turn a Nintendo 64 liquid wave tech demo into "something fun". While the innovative physics engine of *Wave Race 64*'s water was incredible, allowing a level of dynamic interaction between the player and environment not yet seen in a console racing game, something about the game felt too in step with racing games on rival systems.

> *"AT THE TIME, NO ONE KNEW JUST WHAT WAVE RACE 64 WOULD BECOME"*

Writing for Time.com, Matt Peckham explained in an article that during this period, Nintendo and Rare worked closely together on several projects, and the two dev houses often found themselves interacting as healthy creative rivals. Input from Nintendo often benefitted the output of Rare, and vice versa. Miyamoto added a necktie to *Donkey Kong Country*'s DK character model, and Tim Stamper, cofounder of Rare, suggested ▶

## THE WAVE RACERS

A COLOURFUL CAST WITH REAL CHARACTER

### M JETER

Each racer in *Wave Race 64* looks and handles differently. Miles Jeter is a 24-year-old burly Canadian with a blue and red jet ski. His stats elevate handling over average stability, speed and acceleration. His grip is appalling. Jeter's intended for use by intermediate to advanced players.

### R HAYAMI

Ryota Hayami is an 18-year-old Wave Racer from Japan. The all-around choice with even stats across handling, grip, collision stability, speed and acceleration, he's suitable for first-timers and beginners.

### A STEWART

Ayumi Stewart is a 21-year-old from Japan who rides a pink and yellow jet ski. She has the greatest acceleration of all of the riders, and her handling ability is strong. Maximum speed is a bit slower than the rest, and she is intended to be a good choice for beginners.

### D MARINER

Dave Mariner is the grandpa of the group, at an advanced age of 32 years. He's a hefty American with the greatest maximum speed of all the riders, though his acceleration and grip are weak. His handling is atrocious, and he's intended for use by advanced players.

» [Nintendo 64] What's a Nineties racing game without a hovering support 'copter? Garbage! That's what it is.

» [Nintendo 64] Wildlife in *Wave Race 64* includes dolphins, orcas, ducks and gulls, and they all seem happy to play!

> *"THE BEAUTY OF WAVE RACE 64 IS MULTI-FACETED. UNDER THE SURFACE, THERE'S A LOT TO APPRECIATE THAT MAY AT FIRST GO UNNOTICED"*

*Wave Race 64*'s boats be replaced with jet skis.

The lightweight, nimble craft reacted beautifully with the game's revolutionary water physics, the visible riders added eye-catching animations to the players' vehicles, and suddenly a Stunt Mode became possible. The environments became vibrant and bright, weather effects were added, and before long, *Wave Race 64* as we know it today had taken shape.

**In *Wave Race 64*'s single-player Championship Mode, the player races a jet ski through a variety of coastal courses against three computer-controlled rivals.** The goal of each race is to be the fastest racer, and to finish in first place. Points are awarded based on rank, and to proceed to the next course, the player must earn a certain number of points or more. If the requirement isn't met, the player is disqualified, their shiny jet ski is sent to dry dock, and they're forced to spend the rest of their life (presumably) gutting fish at the local bait shop.

Many of the courses feature obstacles which must be avoided. Floating buoys must be passed to either right or left, denoted by colour and markings on each buoy. Successfully slaloming these fills the player's Power Gauge, which makes the jet ski jet faster. Failing to pass a buoy correctly will sap the ski of its power, causing it to slow down, and missing five buoys during a race will result in disqualification. Stunts can be performed whenever the jet ski is airborne. By inputting certain combinations of moves on the controller's analog stick, it's possible to make the jet ski dive, or spin, or backflip, for example. Skilled players can master shifting their centre of gravity. By tilting the analog stick backward or forward, it's possible to lean into corners, coax extra speed out of the machine, and whip the jet ski's back end around.

It's also possible to be thrown from the jet ski in the event of a collision with an object or another racer. Immediately following such an accident, the player character bobs helplessly to the water's surface before climbing back into the saddle to get back to the race.

Additional game modes include Time Trial, in which the player can record their personal best times; Stunt Mode, in which the player can earn points by doing tricks and racing through rings; and Multiplayer Mode, in which two players can race against one another in local, horizontal split-screen races. This description of the game's modes and mechanics may sound simple. And it is. But the beauty of *Wave Race 64* lies deeper. Under the surface, there's a lot to appreciate that may at first go unnoticed.

The aspect of the game which most obviously impacts gameplay and has led to *Wave Race 64*'s enduring playability (it was recently released as part of the Nintendo Switch's online service), is its realistic and engaging water physics.

# EVERY WAVE A RACE

NINE STUNNING SEAS ON WHICH TO SAIL

## DOLPHIN PARK

Racing games live or die by their racetracks, and *Wave Race 64*'s warm-up course sets the perfect tone. At Dolphin Park, players learn to ride the 3D waves. It's a happy place, a bright introduction to the Nintendo 64's first racing game.

## SUNNY BEACH

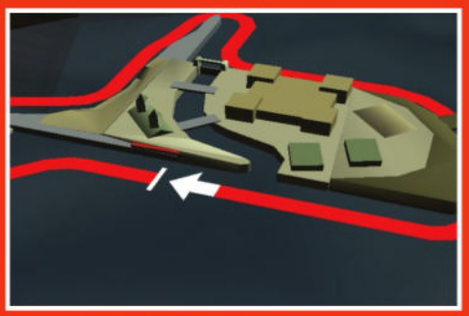
Sunny Beach is a paradise, and the first course in *Wave Race 64*'s Championship Mode. Slalom by buoys that float in aqua water, as white sand beaches and palm trees stretch away to the foggy horizon (a technological necessity).

## SUNSET BAY

The second course in Championship Mode turns up the heat. The sun sets over orange, white-capped waves. The tempo of Kazumi Totaka's musical score keeps pace, while a ramp provides a first taste of the game's airborne acrobatics.

## DRAKE LAKE

The game's third course takes place on a stunning and dynamic lake. The race begins shrouded in fog, but by the third lap, the fog has burned away. Wave Racers must take care to avoid heavy piers, thick lake weed and a duck.

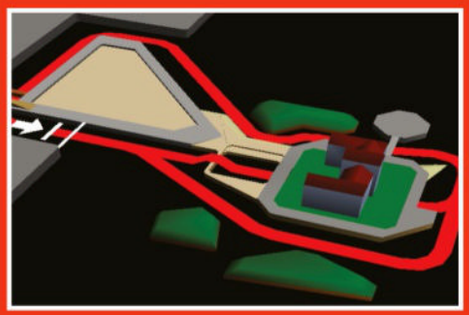


## MARINE FORTRESS

This race takes place in the midst of a violent storm, and the water is extremely choppy. While the massive waves and floating debris can pose a real challenge, there's also opportunity for big air and killer stunts (if you've got the guts).

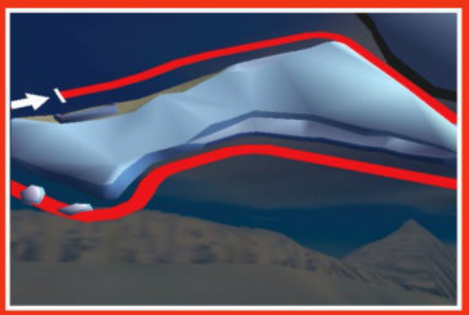
## PORT BLUE

In the boatyard of Port Blue, waves threaten to crush you between an enormous container ship. There's a challenging alternate route through a service tunnel, and that hallmark of Nineties arcade racing games – a hovering helicopter!



## TWILIGHT CITY

Ever dream of riding a jet ski through the streets of Las Vegas? Then have we got a course for you! This is a tricky race accessible in the Hard and Expert Championship Modes. Dazzling spotlights distract from the course's twists, turns and floating mines.



## GLACIER COAST

Only accessible in the game's Expert Championship, Glacier Coast is just what its name suggests; a frozen blast through an arctic gauntlet. Explosive balls of ice and challenging bergs hover just below the water's surface.

## SOUTHERN ISLAND

The final race in all three difficulty Championship Modes, Southern Island is a return to the tropical setting of earlier races. Fast tides ebb and flow, changing the course with every lap. Orcas jump as you make a last push for a podium finish.

# OPEN THE FLOODGATES

### HYDRO THUNDER

Any time we mention *Wave Race 64*, someone inevitably recalls *Hydro Thunder*. Released by Midway for arcades in 1999, *Hydro Thunder* made its biggest splash as a Sega Dreamcast launch title, where its fast action, impressive water physics and arcade-perfect graphics burned into our brains forever.

### SPLASHDOWN

*Splashdown*, by Rainbow Studios, was released for the PS2 in 2001 and Xbox in 2002. It's like *Wave Race 64*, except more realistic in presentation and aesthetic, with environments that lack the whimsy and imagination of Nintendo's racer. A decent enough game that, for this correspondent, misses the podium.

### BLOOD WAKE

This is a water-based, story-driven vehicular combat game that was released soon after the launch of the original Xbox in 2001. Taking place in an Asian-themed fictional water world, the story is dramatic and the wakes, uhh, bloody. It also has fun multiplayer.

» [Nintendo 64] Twilight City is a glittering metropolis with castle hotels and street-level canals. Think Venice mixed with Las Vegas.

» [Nintendo 64] See an iceberg, do a stunt. That's how Wave Racers live their lives.

» [Nintendo 64] *Wave Race 64* made you believe that anything was possible, that everyone would someday own a jet ski.

## SIMILAR GAMES THAT FOLLOWED IN WAVE RACE 64'S WAKE

### JET RACER

Though aesthetically more future-oriented than the bright and bubbly *Wave Race 64*, and though it released just one month after *Wave Race 64*'s debut, *Jet Racer* is often seen as a response to that game's success. It plays similarly but has its own unique ideas.

### SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED

While not exclusively water-based, this racing game from Sega and Sumo Digital smartly combines air, land and sea races into each and every track. Released in 2012, it remains an exciting and dynamic game with outstanding water-based elements, and a fabulous soundtrack by Richard Jacques.

Up to this time, very few racing games had attempted to run on anything but a solid surface, but *Wave Race 64*'s racetracks are set on water. This fundamentally alters the way the game plays in comparison with other racing games. There's an unpredictable and exhilarating feeling as the game's tides roll in and out mid-race, as competitors are tossed over wakes and splashed across a sudden rogue wave, as a dolphin leaps from the translucent water mere inches from the player's bow. Currents ebb and flow, ripples grow into tsunamis, the once-submerged mast of a sunken ship towers suddenly overhead.

**The chaotic changes that this sort of dynamism brings to every race makes every race unique.** There's also a feeling that the challenge is legit, that if you have the nerve and the skill, you can navigate the waves and win. There's randomness, but it's not the sort of programmed randomness of a game like *Mario Kart*, where rubber banding artificially evens the field. In *Wave Race 64*, every race is organic and unique.

And then there are the visuals. Blue skies and fluffy clouds, palm trees reaching high from white sand beaches, the aqua spray of tropical water – it feels that *Wave Race 64* might just as well begin with a Sega AM2 logo. The leader of that development house, Yu Suzuki, once said of his game *OutRun* in a documentary about *Shenmue*, that while others were making "racing games" he wanted to make a "driving game". And that's how it is with Nintendo's *Wave Race 64*. It's less about the race, more about the feeling.

> "THE WAVE RACE 64 SOUNDTRACK IS LIKE A HOT TUB FOR YOUR COCHLEA"

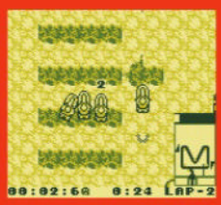
And then there's the music. Kazumi Totaka is simply a legend. He began at Nintendo in 1990 and has created music for *Super Mario Land 2*, *Link's Awakening*, *Animal Crossing* and dozens of other games. In addition to this, he's a voice actor portraying several characters, including Yoshi and KK Slider, a character who is based on Totaka (in Japan, KK Slider is named Totakeke). Totaka's work in *Wave Race 64* is transcendent, a blend of Japanese city pop and airy, up-tempo jazz evocative of optimism and joy. The *Wave Race 64* soundtrack is like a hot tub for your cochlea.

And indeed, the entire game is like a calming dip into crystal clear, perfectly temperate waters. It's a game that's more than just a racing game. At once a pioneering stroke of genius and a cherished memory of a purely joyful time, for those of us who played it on launch, and for a new generation experiencing it for the very first time, *Wave Race 64* is simply unforgettable.

## A LIMITED SERIES

### WAVE RACE GAMES THROUGH THE YEARS

#### WAVE RACE GAME BOY



The *Wave Race* series debuted on the Nintendo Game Boy in 1992 (USA) and 1997 (Europe). A top-down 2D racer in which players slalomed around buoys or competed in race circuits, it was a widely forgotten game until the success of its sequel.

#### WAVE RACE 64: SHINDO PAK TAIO NINTENDO 64

*Wave Race 64* was among the first games for the Nintendo 64. Soon after, in mid-1997, Nintendo released *Star Fox 64* and the accompanying Rumble Pad, a device which added contextual vibration to the system's controller, and *Wave Race 64* was re-released in Japan to add vibration support.

#### WAVE RACE: BLUE STORM GAMECUBE

The third and most recent *Wave Race* game debuted with the launch of Nintendo's GameCube in 2001. *Blue Storm*'s water physics and weather systems were impressive and exciting, but the game ultimately failed to reach the heights of popularity achieved by its N64 predecessor.

# Future Classic

*Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come*

### Info

- **System:** Switch, PC, PS4, Xbox One
- **Year:** 2019
- **Publisher:** Thunderful
- **Developer:** Megagon Industries
- **Key People:** Jan Bubenik, Noah Carev, Daniel Helbig

### Go Deeper

» Several free additional trails are available as DLC, and presently one entirely new island is offered as paid additional content, providing a place of volcanic rocks seemingly inspired by Iceland.

» If the immense challenge of *Lonely Mountain*'s harder trails gets a bit much, Explorer Mode presents each trail with no time pressure or goals. Just enjoy the ride.

» [Switch] Mountain biking may be the focus of Megagon's creation, but its landscapes are the stars.

***Underneath the low-poly skin of Megagon Industry's homage to mountain biking lies a game deeply in love with the sport it celebrates, that serves up a delightful blend of tremendous challenge and meditative rural bliss***

Words by Will Freeman

# LONELY MOUNTAINS: DOWNHILL

## THE BACKGROUND

Few games understand their subject matter as much as 2019's *Lonely Mountains: Downhill*. And yet the intently single-player mountain biking game started out as something rather different.

Megagon Industries began work on the game in 2015, originally intending to create a multiplayer downhill truck racer. It would soon pivot to a focus on mountain biking, however, partly thanks to the vision of one of the developers, who was a devotee of the sport.

Rather than squeeze itself into the trick-frenzy mould set by games like *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding*, *Lonely Mountains* focusses on a much purer expression of what the sport can be. That is, making your way from summit to base in one piece, overcoming terrain and connecting with nature as you identify the best line to follow.

Unusually, Megagon's creation was significantly informed by a single YouTube video. *The Ridge* showcases the skills of the extraordinarily creative mountain biker and street trials rider Danny MacAskill. In it he descends a vast, beautiful mountain alone, showing remarkable elegance and courage as he passes over steep, savage terrain, enacting something like rock climbing downwards on a bike.

As such, *Lonely Mountains* excels in providing a sense of solitary escapism far from the urban, where intimacy with and understanding of the ground beneath your tires is all that matters.

## THE GAME

*Lonely Mountains* offers a range of summits from which you must ride to their foundation, and to a degree, that is the entire offering here. But like a classic arcade game that presents striking simplicity and cavernous depth, it is what you must and can do across those elevations that makes this game so special.

» [Switch] All manner of challenges and Trails give you ample reasons to revisit mountains – countless times.

» [Switch] As with real mountain biking, stretches of controlled braking are just as important as sprints.

» [Switch] It is remarkable that a low-poly game can evoke such a sense of connecting with nature.

## Things of note

### A LONELY CROWD

Crowdfunded on Kickstarter via a very successful campaign, *Lonely Mountains* includes content suggested by the upper-tier backers – from bike paint jobs to animals and trees.

### BUSY MOUNTAINS

While *Lonely Mountains* is an assuredly single-player game, various leaderboards and daily challenges mean that you can compare your performance to countless other riders.

### NIGHT TIMES

With enough persistence and devotion you'll unlock a nighttime mode, which sees the challenge increase significantly as you try to set new records in near-complete darkness.

### GERONIMO'S POWER

Bike choice is everything in *Lonely Mountains*. Some offer speed; others bring strength. Focus on unlocking the Geronimo – a downhill beast that can land massive drops.

### A PHYSICAL RIDE

Super Rare Games published the only boxed version of *Lonely Mountains*. A Switch exclusive, it quickly sold out, and already commands startling collector prices.

The quartet of mountains on offer serve up four courses – or Trails – each. And yet they don't present notably vast spreads of terrain – particularly when you consider you only ever see one side of each peak.

Indeed, *Lonely Mountains* is significantly and thoughtfully minimal in myriad ways. There is no capacity for tricks or high score, no music, no ability to move the camera, a low-detail, low-poly aesthetic, and the exact opposite of cluttered UI. One could even consider it a game that has deliberately rejected many of the conventions of modern gaming.

That minimalism serves a single purpose. The focus is on the riding and the setting alone. The lack of music is a bold creative choice, but perfectly evokes a sense of riding through rural bliss, the gentle ticking of your bike pawls, birdsong and the breeze giving a delightful sense of peace and isolation.

And yet *Lonely Mountains* contains a bounty challenge. Each of the courses can be followed along a visually clear dirt pathway from beginning to end, passing through checkpoints – and that's exactly what you'll likely do when you first tackle each, racing the clock if you want to unlock bike parts that can be traded for better two-wheeled machines. As more challenges open up – divided into Beginner and Expert categories – you'll soon be asked to hit times that make it obvious you'll need to discover a few shortcuts.

And therein lies the true game that *Lonely Mountains* is. Because each peak is riddled with a tangle of shortcuts that intersect with the checkpoints, some obvious, and others merely hinted at. Megagon has proved itself a master of the grammar of level design, because every environment is packed with hidden messages that whisper where alternative routes might be. Spend just a few hours with *Lonely Mountains*, and you'll soon be fluent in understanding how its levels speak to you. The likes of colourful patches of flowers or slightly eroded sections of the steepest slopes hint that there might be a faster – albeit more precarious – way down that can help you shed precious seconds. And then you are always free to try and find a way down that the developers never intended you to use; as long as it's possible under the terms of grip, momentum, breaking power, balance, impact and other metrics set by the physics system.

Thanks to simple controls and wonderful vehicle and environment physics, however, *Lonely Mountains* can absolutely be mastered – and when things do go wrong, you'll only ever have your own command of the handlebars to blame.

And so it is that *Lonely Mountains* so expertly captures the dichotomy of mountain biking. It is a daring, exhilarating, demanding, and dangerous pursuit – and at the very same time, a chance for meditative, gentle, quiet escapism. Few games offer both those things so deftly.

## WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Beyond a quality level so high it can look down on Everest, *Lonely Mountains* brings strikingly wide appeal. If you are after a relaxed, meditative spot of rural escapism, Magagon's creation provides just that. If you're a mountain biker, it presents an experience that truly understands your sport. If you prefer to pursue difficulty and understanding of gaming nuance, it offers something that can fill many hundreds of hours on your journey to mastery. There's a captivating balance to the variety of bikes, challenges, and experiences too. And few examples of the medium offer level design that succeeds quite so well in making you feel so fused to a game world. One of the best cycling games ever? Absolutely. ✱

# THE MAKING OF The MOVIES

Run the Studio. Shoot the Movies. Make the Stars!

A GAME ABOUT MOVIES? IT'S ALL ABOUT LIVING A GLAMOROUS HOLLYWOOD LIFE AND RAKING IN THE CASH, ISN'T IT? WELL, YES, UNTIL YOU'RE WORRYING ABOUT PICKING UP TRASH, ACTORS GETTING DRUNK AND POOR PUBLICITY. BUT AT LEAST YOU GET TO MAKE SOME AWESOME FILMS

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

» [PC] Actors always need somewhere private to relax and you can cater for their every whim.

## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** LIONHEAD STUDIOS
- **PLATFORM:** PC, MAC
- **RELEASED:** 2005
- **GENRE:** BUSINESS SIMULATION

**Picture the scene. Peter Molyneux is lying in bed, covers tucked up around his neck, dreaming soundly.** Suddenly he awakes, startled, sitting bolt upright, eyes widened and a smile on his face. It is 5am and Peter is excited. He has just come up with an idea for a new game.

Cut to the Lionhead Studios office that very same day. Peter has two sheets of paper in his hands and he's waving them around, enthusiastically. It's a very early design draft, noting things he believes should be in this awesome new game. Close up: his brain is whirring. Who shall he approach to help? Peter is something of an auteur but he can't do this alone.

Peter's idea is to create a business simulation game in a similar vein to *Theme Park* and *Theme Hospital*, two titles he had a hand in producing at his previous studio, Bullfrog Productions. He'd sold that developer to Electronics Arts in January 1995 and he left two years later to found Lionhead. His contacts book is bursting at the seams. "Fancy working on a new game based on the movies?" he asks, and one by one, top developers come aboard, starting with Adrian Moore (*Theme Hospital*, *Populous: The Beginning*, *Magic Carpet 2: The Netherworlds*) and James Brown (*Tower Of The Ancients*, *Star Monkey*). They sit in the office, ready to get rolling. And action! A new PC title begins production.

"Peter came up with the idea of making a game about running a movie studio," says Lionhead cofounder Mark Webley. "We'd obviously done the *Theme* games back at Bullfrog and this was a lovely idea in a similar business management vein. We liked the idea of taking the game through the history of the film industry, from the early silent films to the latest technology. It would give us an opportunity to keep things fresh and evolving throughout the game and, as film lovers and huge fans of Hollywood with all of its interesting characters and foibles, we wanted to pay homage to it."

Jan 1960
$1,247,249
Facilities
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Casting Office
$5,000 , 1 Owned
Cosmetic Surgery
$60,000 , 0 Owned
Crew Facility
$4,000 , 1 Owned
Custom Scriptwriting Office
$11,111 , 1 Owned
Laboratory
$24,000 , 1 Owned
Makeover Department
$7,000 , 1 Owned
Post Production
$39,000 , 0 Owned
Production Office
$6,000 , 1 Owned
Cosmetic Surgery
$60,000
The place to send pug-ugly Stars who look like they were dropped at birth and overeaters who are carrying too many pounds. Implants, Nip & Tuck and Liposuction services are available here. Nip & Tuck is available straight away, but the other two rooms must be unlocked through research.

» [PC] As well as the typical buildings you'd expect in a movie studio, there were some quirky ones. Cosmetic surgery for the pug-ugly, anyone?

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**BLACK & WHITE**
**RELEASED:** 2001
**PLATFORM:** PC, MAC

**FABLE (PICTURED)**
**RELEASED:** 2004
**PLATFORM:** XBOX, PC, MAC

**FABLE II**
**RELEASED:** 2008
**PLATFORM:** XBOX 360

» [PC] Construction is as easy as choosing a facility to build from a lengthy list, depending on how much cash in the bank you had.

> "WE LIKED THE IDEA OF TAKING THE GAME THROUGH THE HISTORY OF THE FILM INDUSTRY, FROM THE EARLY SILENT FILMS TO THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY
> MARK WEBLEY

It was 2002 and the key concept was to put players in the shoes of a movie studio mogul overseeing everything to do with the film-making process. Players would seek to turn actors into stars and try to tame their wild extravagances as and when they emerged. They'd manage egos and seek to keep the mood high typically by alleviating boredom and stress, cultivating happy relationships and curbing alcohol addiction. A movie's quality and success would depend on it.

"I think whenever we have approached a game like this, it's been based on our perception of a business," says Mark. "Obviously we'd research the various technologies that really changed the movie industry but Hollywood stars have been under the spotlight for so long it wasn't difficult to imagine the kind of issues and personalities that the game's actors and director might have. I guess we really didn't need to exaggerate anything as there are some massive personalities in real life!"

Stars wouldn't be the only problems in (tinsel) town. Other staff would include movie crews and extras along with builders, scriptwriters, scientists and janitors. You'd need to hire and fire, build experience among workers and construct world-class facilities such as a stage school, production office, stage set, laboratory and casting office while keeping on top of maintenance and making modifications if necessary. Keeping a studio lot clean would be important too. "We seemed obsessed with toilets and rubbish," says Gary Carr, who was Lionhead's head of studio, and you'd also need somewhere nice for workers to eat and rest.

» Gary Carr is now the studio director of Two Point Studios, the company he cofounded.

» Mark Webley cofounded Two Point Studios in 2016, making *Two Point Hospital* and *Two Point Campus*.

**Since players were going through the eras, they wouldn't have everything available to them from the start.** "It made sense to unlock a lot of content through simulation progression," says Gary, who had recently closed his company, Muckyfoot Productions (*Urban Chaos*, *Startopia*, *Blade II*) and joined *The Movies* team when the game was in a relatively early stage. "Even before I joined, the progression system was in place," he continues. "The team was creating a lot of content – sets, characters, not to mention ways to augment/customise it all. The game progressed the player from 1920 through 100 years of cinema so, as technology ▶

» [PC] There are loads of film sets to choose from, each selection being reflective of the era.

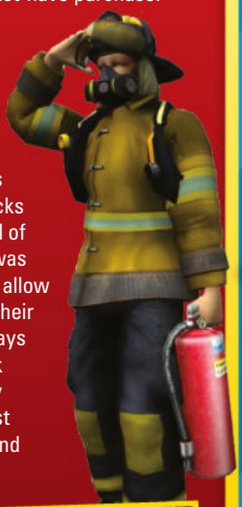
# AND MORE ACTION!

## THE MOVIES WAS SOON SET ALIGHT

For those who wanted to take their movies to another level with additional sets, props, vehicles, backdrops and costumes, Lionhead released an expansion pack called *The Movies: Stunts & Effects* in 2006 which integrated well with the core game. As the name suggests, players could create more spectacular blockbusters using stuntmen and women enacting death-defying feats. A free camera mode also allowed for camera placement and movement, and there were scenic city flybys.

The stunt element was integrated into the business side of the game too, making the expansion pack something of a must-buy for any type of fan ("I feel there were two types of players – simulation fans and those who loved to create content through the in-game movie maker," says Lionhead's head of studio, Gary Carr). It started in 1960, introduced fire and explosions, and added camera filters, making it a must-have purchase.

"I was proud of what *The Movies* achieved, especially with the release of *Stunts & Effects* which allowed much more additional editing and movie-making techniques," continues Gary. The idea was to create more expansion packs to really unleash the potential of the game. "Our second DLC was going to include an update to allow players to pretty much build their own scenes from scratch," says executive lead designer Mark Webley. "But sales were way below what had been forecast and we never got to our second expansion pack."



advanced and styles and genres evolved, the game reflected this."

Starting the game in the early Hollywood era had a secondary effect. "It gave us the ability to keep things simple initially – there were fewer plates for the player to spin until the technology evolved," says Mark. "More elements were then introduced and it helped to ensure the learning curve wasn't too steep." The important thing – and a challenge – was to ensure that tasks wouldn't ever start to feel like a chore.

"Simulation games are all about task management so they probably are too much of a chore for non-sim game fans," Gary explains. "But for those who enjoy management and planning, it's all about balancing and increasing the challenge which unlocks appropriate game rewards such as new content. If I was to say what was the key to a great simulation game, it isn't the subject matter or even the features per se, it's all about the balance of those features."

> "IT WASN'T DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THE KIND OF ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES THAT THE GAME'S ACTORS AND DIRECTOR MIGHT HAVE"
> MARK WEBLEY

» [PC] The stuntmen appeared as part of a pack and were available from 1960 onwards.

**One of the first things the team needed to do was get the basic game loop working**. When this was being devised, there was only a small core of people working on the project – Adrian and James, along with senior environment artists Rohan Knuckey and Cris White, animator Simon Boscaro and the engine architect technical lead Jean-Claude Cottier.

"The basic game loop gave us time to play, develop and balance as we progressed through the development," Mark says. "But lots changed over the time we developed it such as the UI which we tried to keep minimal where we could." The game's lead artist Joe Rider (*Dungeon Keeper*, *Urban Chaos*) says user accessibility and intuitive controls was also a foremost consideration. "The goal was to create an interface that was easy to navigate, allowing players to manage their studios efficiently without

# MASTERING THE MOVIES

## DON'T HIRE STRESS POTS

When you're looking for a star for your movie, physique and looks are actually important in this game. But so too is the need to go for a star who isn't prone to stress and addiction. You'd have to work harder to make them happy.

## SEEK GENRE EXPERIENCE

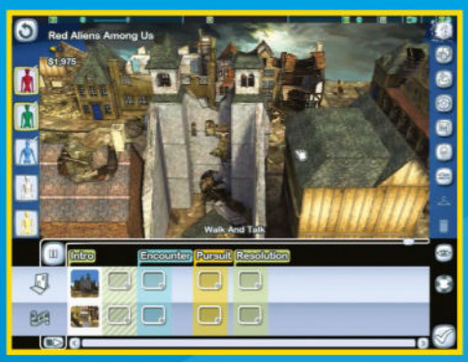
Directors need to have genre experience more than anything else. That way, you can be sure that they'll be able to pull off the film that you intend them to helm. You should also look to hire extras based on their genre experience.

feeling overwhelmed by the game's complexity," Joe says. "It was a very ambitious and forward-thinking mechanic that didn't really get the praise it deserved."

Joe says the original art concept was brought to life under Adrian's project lead, overseen by Mark Smart, the original art lead who left to finish *Fable*. Joe, who had previously worked on the unreleased Xbox title, *BC*, built upon this vision. "The overall look of *The Movies* was heavily inspired by classic Hollywood, particularly drawing from the golden age of MGM Studios," he says. "The game's visual design paid homage to the grandeur and glamour of this era, echoing the elaborate sets and opulent style seen in classic MGM productions. This influence was evident in the meticulously detailed studio lots, which reflected the bustling atmosphere of early Hollywood."

The game was developed using a custom-built engine by Lionhead. "This engine allowed the development team to create detailed environments and characters, ensuring a high level of customisation and control over the game's graphical elements," Joe adds. "Every detail was concepted by an incredibly talented team and built and optimised in 3DS Max." There was no doubting the team's ambition.

One of the most eye-catching features was the ability to zoom in to ground level from a bird's eye view, allowing much more detail to be seen – to the point where you'd see filming take place on sets. "It added a layer of complexity to the game," Joe says. "This feature required detailed rendering at multiple levels of magnification and sophisticated coding to ensure smooth transitions and maintain the game's performance and visual fidelity across different views."



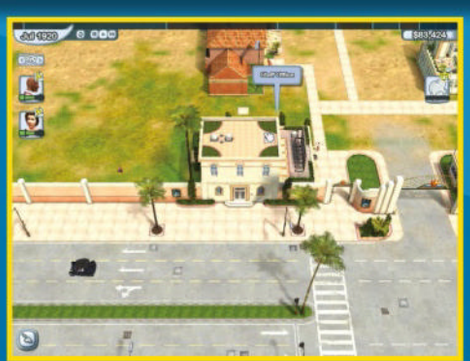

» [PC] With patience, it was possible to create a stunning animated movie which was groundbreaking at the time.

**Relationships between the characters was also emphasised.** "We had a traits system based on 'want and needs' which we had evolved over the years," Gary says. "But we tried something quite different in *The Movies* which we called the SITTS system (Super Interactive Tool Tips). It allowed the player to expose a lot of the underlying simulation systems in a visual way. They were a sort of thought and speech-bubble system that players could further expose by clicking on the characters as they wandered around or interacted with other characters in the game."

This concept came later in the development and it was part of the usual process of ▶

» [PC] Zoom in from the bird's eye view of the studio and you'd be able to see the studio living and breathing.

## A PLACE ON THE HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME IS JUST A FEW STEPS AWAY



### MAKE THOSE CONNECTIONS

■ When constructing buildings, keep them as close together as possible so you don't end up wasting space that could be used for building sets. Make sure all paths connect to each building and that it's possible to reach a building from the Staff Office.

### DON'T SPLASH THE CASH

■ You may think handing out wads of money to your top stars is a good way to keep them happy and on side. It is. But if you do go overboard too early, you may find that you need to cut costs and slashing those wages is going to cause problems.

### SCHEDULE A RELEASE

■ You don't actually have to release a film the moment it's ready to be shown. You may find that you've created a movie in a genre that people are currently not interested in. So wait until the public is ready then get that publicity machine rolling.

» [PC] Since this was a business sim first and foremost, you always needed to keep an eye on the bottom line.

» [PC] As well as constructing buildings, you needed to landscape – at the very least laying some paths.

» [PC] To lend some context and humour, you could see how the outside world was faring and gauge how specific genres would be affected. Here, for example, sci-fi movies have been given a boost.

# CREATING MOVIEMAKERS

## HOW THE MOVIES TURNED GAMERS INTO DIRECTORIAL STARS

By flexing their creative muscles in the game's film-making tool, players of *The Movies* were able to produce some stunning machinima-style films. Perhaps the most famous is Alex Chan's *The French Democracy* which was created over four days to highlight the racism he felt caused civil unrest in France in 2005.

It wasn't perfectly executed but it got a wide airing courtesy of Lionhead's decision to allow user-created videos to be uploaded to *The Movies Online*. This was before YouTube was officially launched to the public and within five weeks of being unveiled, it was attracting more than a million unique users. *The Movies*' 19,000 user-created films at that time had received 100 million hits.

"The export and share features were ahead of their time," affirms lead graphics artist Joe Rider. "This capability made the game a pioneer in machinima, enabling players to create animated films using the game engine." Users were creating a whole host of movies

from spaghetti Westerns, musicals and psycho thrillers to sci-fi, crime dramas and comedies. "*The Movies Online* was starting to become a service for gamers who wanted to produce unique content and share," says Lionhead's head of studio, Gary Carr. "Some of the movies were incredible."

Users would use the Post Production facility to ready their film for export, earn virtual credits to spend on new props, catch up with news of events and check out the charts. Films could be rated by members, earning users a title that was also partly based on how many movies they'd uploaded (the most prestigious was a movie-making legend). Movies-created films were also showcased at events such as the Warrington Film Festival, England, and the Crysler in The Movies: Virtual Film Competition. But times soon changed.

"A year or so after launch, YouTube rose with the advancements in smartphone technology and I guess *The Movies*' limitations for unique content saw people eventually move away," says Gary. "But I'm still very proud of what the game achieved."

» [PC] You don't want your stars to get drunk or become addicted to alcohol otherwise you'll lower their mood.

tweaking and changing a game's UI and UX to ensure they worked well. "What we had built wasn't right and we'd taken a pretty standard approach," says Mark. "So that's why we created the SITTS system where you could hover over something and the key info was shown, then hold the hover for longer so that more information would be revealed and so on. It's why we added the expanding HUD, a breadcrumb trail to guide the player to the right building, and UI inside the actual buildings. Sometimes it's pretty difficult to get the UI/UX right before you've got all the features in and you've played the game a lot."

One of the most important decisions as development continued, however, added a whole new dimension to *The Movies* and elevated the game from being a purely business simulation title, turning it into a creative tool as well. Originally, the developers intended players to create trailers for their films but this idea was vastly expanded. "We introduced the ability to create whole movies where players could add music tracks and voice-overs and so on," says Mark." We ended up creating so many animations and scenes which meant that part of the team was huge."

To create movies, a player needed a functional studio, a Custom Scriptwriting Office and a Post Production facility as well as sets, actors, directors and extras. There was a Sandbox mode which allowed a greater focus on movie-making but studio assets generally needed to be unlocked as players progressed through the game, although cheats soon emerged to get around this requirement. You'd take your characters and assign them roles while choosing sets and selecting from a large number of scenes. The scenes could be modified and you could decide on shots – medium, close up and the like – while working on the dialogue. It could so easily have worked as a groundbreaking standalone app but to have it as part of a game was all the more jaw-dropping.

"We always imagined the player would be able to make trailers for their movies so there might be disparate scenes put together in some cool, exciting way," says Mark. "But as we got into it, we realised we wanted to push it further and give the player the tools to put something more impressive together. It was a bit crazy really. We had 28 animators and 17 scene designers creating the elements that we thought most people would want."

**At the heart of it was a tool called Besson.** "Jean-Claude built it to allow us to manage and build the scenes, so that characters and outfits could be changed, props and camera could be positioned and voice-overs, SFX and music could be easily added," says Mark. Movie-making was, in many respects, the icing on the cake for what turned out to be a gloriously quirky game.

For this was a title which leaned into the silent era of movie-making history from an animation performance perspective. "I really enjoyed the 'hammy' overacting and also the way the characters interacted with each other on the Lot, all driven by the under-the-hood game systems," Gary says. It was also a title that understood the precarious nature of Hollywood and how critics could make or break a movie which is why the main part of the game would look to judge a finished movie – something which, in fact, posed an interesting problem according to Mark. "What one person thinks is a great movie is rubbish in the eyes of someone else," he explains. "So our approach to whether your movie was a hit or not was based on the rating of all the elements you had put into the movie and then comparing that to the varying trends of what genres and so on were popular. If everyone was into Westerns in a particular era, then releasing a high-quality Western was likely to give you a hit! Staying up with some of the latest technology too was important – releasing a silent movie in the Noughties was less likely to be popular but if it was directed by someone like Wes Anderson, it may well have had a chance of being a hit."

> "WHAT ONE PERSON THINKS IS A GREAT MOVIE IS RUBBISH IN THE EYES OF SOMEONE ELSE
> MARK WEBLEY

*The Movies* shipped in November 2005 and it went down a storm, critically at least. Although it wasn't perceived as being perfect, it proved pivotal. "*The Movies* was praised for its innovative features and depth and, in many ways, it was incredibly future-forward," says Joe.

Sadly, however, Joe points out it fell short in terms of sales. "It did not fully deliver in all its commercial potential which was a disappointment for all the amazing talent that was involved in bringing it all to life." Mark says the game eventually sold around a million units but sale expectations had been higher which is why an expansion pack, *The Movies: Stunts & Effects*, was underway before the main game was released (a Mac version of *The Movies* followed more than a year later).

Nevertheless, the team had a blast. "It was one of the most challenging games I've been part of pulling together with one of the most exceptionally talented teams involved," says Gary. Joe agrees wholeheartedly. "The talent that worked on that game was incredibly influential in the industry and made a huge contribution to big games that were to come, such as *LittleBigPlanet* and the *Fable* franchise." In that sense, *The Movies* was nothing short of a blockbuster. "Just look at the credits reel on YouTube," Gary adds. "It lists some of the greatest game devs of that era." ✱

» [PC] There are lots of movie genres to choose from but it's worthwhile gauging what the public are currently into.

# Nanaca Crash

BIKE-BASHING BRILLIANCE

» RETROREVIVAL




» FLASH » 2005 » TAKAHIRO NARUMIYA

**In the days before internet culture was consolidated under a few massive social-media sites, I'd often find myself playing around with browser games made with Macromedia Flash.** There were big sites that hosted plenty of them, like Newgrounds and Albino Blacksheep, but one of my absolute favourite games was an independently hosted game called *Nanaca Crash*. Many non-Japanese players at the time probably didn't realise that it was a fan game based on the 2003 visual novel *Cross Channel*. I'll admit that I've also never played it, although a friend tells me that the official English translation released in 2018 is somewhat incoherent.

Anyway, *Nanaca Crash* puts you in charge of Nanaca, a girl who has an unfortunate habit of smashing into Taichi with her bike. Click the left mouse button to set the angle he's launched at, release to set the power, and off he goes – and your job is to keep him going, by teleporting Nanaca in for aerial crashes. Up to three times per game, you can boost Taichi upwards while he's falling. You can shoot him downwards as he's ascending instead, and this is a rechargeable action. Why would you want to send Taichi downwards? Well, the road happens to be littered with Taichi's classmates, who he can bump into.

Ideally you want to avoid the guys, Hiroshi and Tomoki, who alter Taichi's angle of travel and slow him down respectively. However, most of the girls will launch Taichi further, prolonging the game. Youko will usually block him from colliding with the other girls and colliding with Misato will normally end the game, but any of the girls can provide special moves to greatly increase Taichi's speed under special circumstances, so there's a surprising amount of depth involved in getting the best scores. Despite the demise of Flash, *Nanaca Crash* is still freely playable online, so why not give it a go next time you're bored at the computer?

BEST RECORD:
6618.29m
NEW RECORD:
6618.29m
10.43m/s
SPECIAL
ELEPORT!!
OSTL
CRASH

» There's plenty to play this month, including a slick remake of Beyond Good & Evil, a Switch update of Monster Hunter Stories and the latest Super Monkey Ball game. We also go running and gunning with the latest tome from Bitmap Books

» [PlayStation 5] *Beyond Good & Evil*'s shallow and spongy combat is definitely showing its age now.

# Beyond Good & Evil 20th Anniversary Edition

## UBISOFT'S EXTRAVAGENT UPDATE WON'T LEAVE YOU JADED

**INFORMATION**

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PS5
- **ALSO ON:** PC, PS4, SWITCH, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £17.99
- **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT
- **PLAYERS:** 1

**While it wasn't a huge commercial hit on release, Ubisoft's *Beyond Good & Evil* has gone on to become a cult classic, adored by those who fell in love with the mining planet of Hillys and the creatures and characters that inhabited it.** It's rather fitting then that Ubisoft has polished the game up for its 20th anniversary and married it to a truly comprehensive behind-the-scenes gallery that offers a staggering amount of insight into the game's creation (see the Magnifique Galerie panel).

If you've never experienced *Beyond Good & Evil* before it tells the story of Jade, a freelance journalist who lives in a lighthouse with her Uncle Pey'j (an anthropomorphised pig) and a number of orphans who have all been displaced due to the presence of an alien race called the DomZ. Although Hillys is under the military protection of a group called the Alpha Sections there is distrust from an underground group called the IRIS Network and it soon commissions Jade to find one of its missing members and discover the truth about the Alpha Sections, who IRIS believe is in cahoots with the alien race.

It's easy to see why *Beyond Good & Evil* resonates with so many gamers. Hillys is a truly engaging place, peppered with odd anachronisms and some genuinely delightful characters,

» [PlayStation 5] There's a lot of enjoyable boss battles in *Beyond Good & Evil* – aside from the last one…

**BRIEF HISTORY**

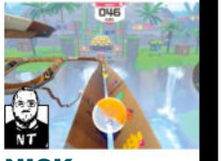
» *Beyond Good & Evil* made its debut in 2004 and instantly received critical acclaim due to its mix of charming characters and varied game mechanics. Although it wasn't a commercial hit for Ubisoft, it was re-released digitally in 2011, while its highly anticipated sequel is apparently still in the works after a trailer debuted in 2017.

### ★ PICKS OF THE MONTH

**DARRAN**

**Monster Hunter Stories**

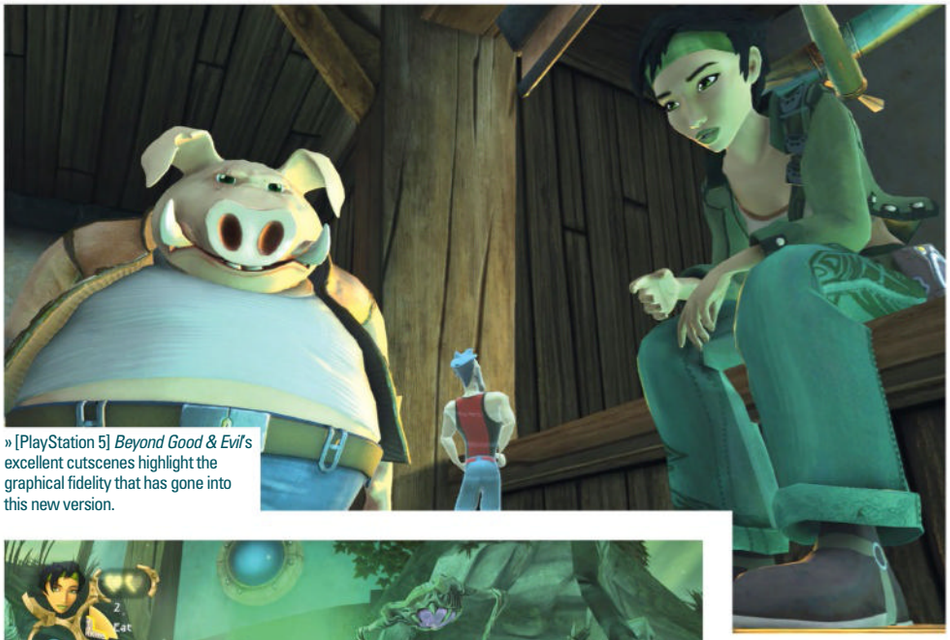
It's nowhere near as challenging as traditional *Monster Hunter* games, but I've still had a lot of fun with Capcom's charming remake.



**NICK**

**Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble**

Maybe Sega is just pandering to me, but the brand-new *Sonic*-style Spin Dash move genuinely adds to the classic formula.



» [PlayStation 5] *Beyond Good & Evil*'s excellent cutscenes highlight the graphical fidelity that has gone into this new version.

» [PlayStation 5] Fancy a challenge? The new Speedrun Mode requires you to complete the game without saving.

particularly Jade and the relationship she shares with her beloved uncle. It's an oddball mix of open-world game design and *Zelda*-like dungeons and while it's certainly showing its age in numerous places, *Beyond Good & Evil*'s interesting story and engaging heroes will ensure you push through its more troublesome areas.

There's a patchwork approach to *Beyond Good & Evil*'s game design, with Michel Ancel and his team throwing numerous mechanics into the game, from racing sections and platforming to stealth and *Crash Bandicoot*-styled into-the-screen chases. Some sections work better than others and Jade is often joined by a couple of teammates, including Pey'j, who can help her solve the numerous puzzles that crop up as she explores.

*Beyond Good & Evil* is at its best when you're simply allowed to explore Hilly's gorgeous overworld. Early on in the game, Jade is commissioned to photograph the exotic creatures that roam Hillys and it's genuinely good fun trying to seek them all out. Some creatures only show up in specific locations so you'll need to check every nook and cranny to find them.

Unfortunately, the game's lengthy stealth sections haven't aged at all well thanks to some rather suspect AI, which means you can be easily located in an area where you were previously safe. Being spotted inevitably leads to combat and this is another area of the game that hasn't aged at all well. It's incredibly basic, feels quite spongy and the low health of your teammates means the game over screen will often appear through not fault of your own. The Slaughterhouse is arguably one of the most testing parts of the game, which is a shame as it has some genuinely decent puzzles in it when you're not struggling to sneak your way past the bothersome guards found there. Boss fights are another area of the game that caused us a few issues. Many of them are actually quite inventive, requiring a bit of lateral thinking to tackle them, but the final boss you face is an absolute pig to defeat (sorry Pey'j) and undid quite a bit of the goodwill we had for Ubisoft's delightfully quirky game.

It's a shame that *Beyond Good & Evil*'s game mechanics don't match the quality of its world and characters because Ubisoft has done an excellent job of sprucing up the game for a new generation of gamers. While it's not quite verging into remake territory, many of the textures have been vastly improved, and there's some genuinely impressive dynamic lighting on display which really helps Hillys come to life in a way that it couldn't quite manage 20 years ago. A few quality-of-life improvements have been added as well, but they're more subtle refinements than dramatic improvements, meaning it's only really *Beyond Good & Evil*'s visuals that feel improved in any significant way.

Although Ubisoft's game has certainly aged, this is arguably the definitive way to experience it. It's a harder sell if you own the HD digital release from 2011, but anyone else will discover a truly memorable game that is as captivating as it is frustrating. ✱

## In a nutshell

**While its kitchen sink approach to its game mechanics won't appeal to everyone, *Beyond Good & Evil*'s memorable characters, strong story and gorgeous art style mean it's still worth exploring.**

» Score **78%**

### ✱ MAGNIFIQUE GALERIE

▼ UBISOFT'S BEHIND-THE-SCENES GALLERY IS ABSOLUTELY SUPERB

**PERHAPS THE BIGGEST HIGHLIGHT OF UBISOFT'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY UPDATE IS THE EXCEPTIONAL BEHIND-THE-SCENES ACCESS IT INCLUDES. IT'S A MASSIVELY COMPREHENSIVE COLLECTION OF SLIDES AND VIDEOS THAT OFFER INCREDIBLE INSIGHT INTO THE GAME'S DEVELOPMENT, FROM ITS EARLY PRE-PRODUCTION STARRING A CUTE PROTAGONIST CALLED SALLY, TO ITS EVENTUAL RECEPTION BY CRITICS. WHILE IT'S CLEARLY GOING TO DELIGHT LONG-STANDING FANS OF THE GAME, THERE'S ENOUGH GENUINELY INSIGHTFUL STUFF HERE TO MAKE IT A FASCINATING READ FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN THE CREATION OF VIDEOGAMES.**

» [PlayStation 5] There's a large selection of goods that Jade can buy using the money she gets from defeating enemies and taking photographs.

## PICK OF THE MONTH

# Nintendo World Championships: NES Edition

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £24.99, (£49.99 physical edition) » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

**This speedrunning package is comprised of 13 classic NES games, including all four *Super Mario Bros* games, both *Zelda* games, *Metroid, Excitebike, Kirby's Adventure, Kid Icarus, Balloon Fight* and *Ice Climber*.** The single-player portion of the game offers over 150 timed challenges, which can be as simple as entering the first cave in *The Legend Of Zelda* and as involved as using Warp Pipes to take the shortest route through *Super Mario Bros*.

You're given a ranking based on your completion time, but the times required to achieve each rank are kept secret. Still, there are some really useful features including a prominent timer and a side-by-side replay of your personal-best run. There are also pop-up hints reminding you of key strategies and guides for the longer challenges, and perhaps less welcomely, the game won't let you stray off the intended path.

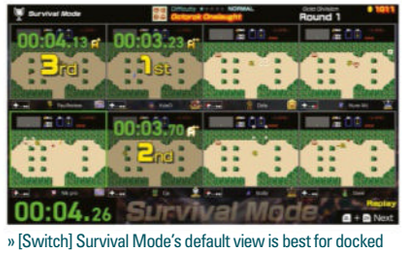
Some games have far more challenges than others – the *Mario* games get a lot, while *Excitebike* gets just six, further highlighting the platformer-heavy nature of the selection.

Fortunately, the multiplayer modes successfully channel the competitive spirit the title implies. For offline multiplayer, Party Mode lets up to eight players race in themed Challenge Packs. Nintendo World Championship Mode allows you to register your best scores on a selection of five challenges for a weekly online ranking, while Survival Mode allows you to race against seven other players' ghost data over a gauntlet of three challenges.

For solo players, this package has a questionable lifespan, but there's plenty here for the competitively inclined. It's a good start to a possible series, and hopefully a future SNES edition will iron out the wrinkles.

» Score **78%**

» [Switch] This is probably an ideal package for streamers looking to dabble with speedrunning.




» [Switch] Survival Mode's default view is best for docked players – handheld fans should have their window bigger.

## Super Monkey Ball: Banana Rumble

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £39.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

**Sega's spectacular simians are back, and mostly back on form.** The Adventure Mode gives you a lightweight story and 200 new levels to tackle in solo or co-op fashion, and in traditional *Super Monkey Ball* style they eventually get mighty tricky. After the disappointingly odd physics of *Banana Mania*, this game feels far better and the new *Sonic*-style Spin Dash move makes for a natural addition. Sadly, the 16-player online multiplayer doesn't live up to expectations – the framerate is halved to 30fps and the five minigames aren't amazingly exciting, leaving you to pine for the likes of Monkey Target. Still, this is the best that core *Super Monkey Ball* has felt in years.

**NICK THORPE**

» Score **78%**

## Run 'N' Gun: A History Of On-Foot Shooters

» **Buy it for:** £34.99
» **Buy it from:** bitmapbooks.com

**After debuting with *Go Straight*, Dave Cook's second Bitmap Books release is a far stronger offering that's dedicated to the run-and-gun shooter.** As with *Go Straight*, a number of other writers have contributed, including YouTube personality Sega Lord X, Chris Scullion, Kurt Kalata and our very own Graeme Mason. While we spotted a few niggling omissions and knowledge gaps in *Go Straight*, *Run 'N' Gun* feels far more polished and also has a better representation of the home-computer market. Dave clearly knows his stuff and while it's light on interview content, it remains an entertaining read. It also looks beautiful, as you'd expect from Bitmap Books. If you're a fan of the genre, this absolutely deserves a place on your bookshelf.

**DARRAN JONES**

## Monster Hunter Stories

» **System:** Switch (tested), PC, PS4
» **Buy it for:** £24.98 » **Buy it from:** Online

**First released on Nintendo's 3DS, *Monster Hunter Stories* is undoubtedly aimed at the younger gamer.** It's far more story-focussed than traditional games in the series and also utilises a turn-based approach to its fighting. There's a strong focus on stealing eggs and training the monsters found within them and it's possible to team up with your mount to pull off some devastatingly strong attacks. Playing on a bigger screen highlights some of the game's visual shortcomings, but the core gameplay has translated over well, even if some of the better DLC didn't make the journey. Don't be fooled by its cutesy exterior, this is a compelling strategy game and a fine introduction to the popular series.

**DARRAN JONES**

» Score **70%**

# RELIVE THE GLORY DAYS OF HANDHELD SUPREMACY

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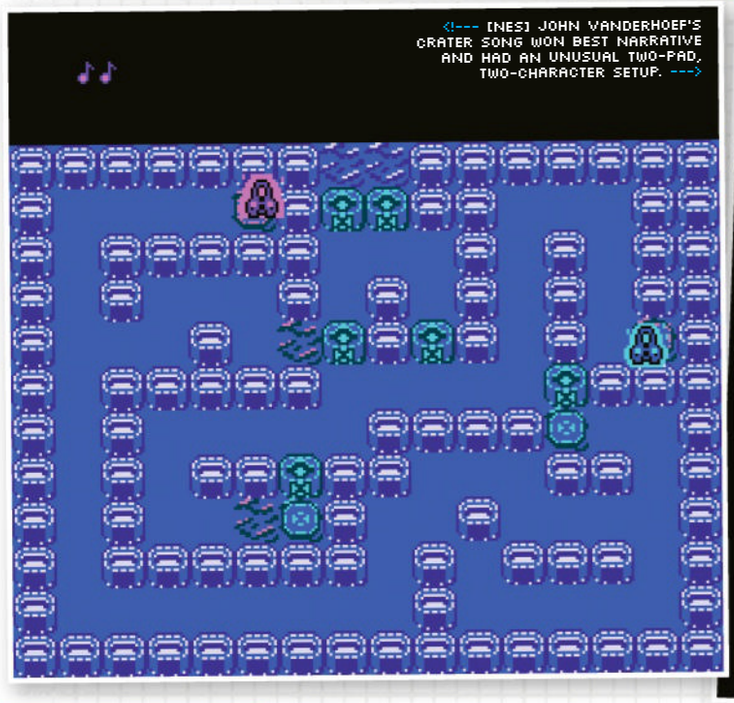
# THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- [NES] JOHN VANDERHOEF'S CRATER SONG WON BEST NARRATIVE AND HAD AN UNUSUAL TWO-PAD, TWO-CHARACTER SETUP. --->

<!--- [NES] DESIGN 16X16 PIXEL IMAGES TO MAKE IN REAL LIFE WITH JOE SHERMAN'S 8-BIT BRIX DESIGN STUDIO. --->

<INTRO> INSPIRATION CAN COME FROM MANY PLACES. IT COULD BE THE THEME OF A COMPETITION OR GAME JAM. IT COULD BE A CLASSIC ARCADE GAME OR AN INDIE HIT FROM A MODERN FORMAT. IT COULD BE THE AVIAN STAR OF A CLASSIC CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME, OR YOU COULD DRAW IDEAS FROM WELL-KNOWN TITLES IN A FAMILIAR GENRE. THE RESULT MEANS THIS HOMEBREW COLUMN HAS A WIDE VARIETY OF ENJOYABLE GAMES TO DISCOVER. </INTRO>

<!--- COMPETITION ORGANISER AND CO-HOST JOE GRANATO HAS THE POWER. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

## BIGGER BYTES

<INTRO> THE 4TH ANNUAL BYTE-OFF COMPETITION FOR NESMAKER GAMES RECEIVED OVER 50 ENTRIES – AS ORGANISER JOE GRANATO IV EXPLAINS </INTRO>

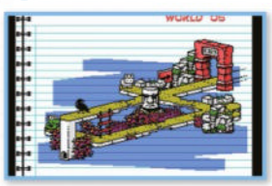
<BODY> **"Not long after we'd released NESmaker, we thought it might be fun to have a competition," says Joe Granato IV about the creation of Byte-Off.** "Once we saw the calibre of games submitted, we decided to do this faux awards show. It's fair to say that Byte-Off is now our community's favourite event all year."

This year's theme was New Frontiers, and the awards show was part of the Midwest Gaming Classic event – streaming live (bit.ly/byteoff4-awards). "To be asked to hold it live was surreal," Joe continues. "It was a blast, and I think it will be even bigger next year." Adding to the fun were brilliant commercials for the entries.

Among the prize categories was the Emissary Award, designed to encourage younger people to get involved. "I have been teaching game development for almost 18 years now," says Joe. "One of the surprising things for me has been how many young people are so compelled to see their game on a real cartridge playing on a CRT. Maybe it's the first time they ever experience a game that way, and it happens to be their own creation. I love that NESmaker has made creation for this console accessible to a new generation; I hope that it plays some part in keeping it alive for new audiences."

The winner was Adam Holmes, working with his children Melody and Jackson on *Substation 7: Episode 1*, combining a comic and NES game. "We have The Wombat award for the most surprising entries," continues Joe. "We've seen digital colouring books, a wrestling game, driving simulators, a dating sim, games with spotlight areas, parallax scrolling, a four-player game… things that go far beyond the included modules." This year's Wombat winner was *Land Ahoy* from The SciNEStist (Brad Hammond), where your pirate sails a land yacht. Best Game overall went to *Pizza Portals* from Artix, where multi-dimensional delivery boy Dash is controlled on two separate screens simultaneously.

## CREATIVE COMPETITIONS



### MSXDEV

msxdev.org

<With prizes and money awarded in this competition, the gorgeous *Snake And Rhino In The Sketchbook* from ARCS won in 2023. />

### CCSCGC 2024

csscgc24.blogspot.com

<Taskmaster Software "lost" in 2023 with its game *Licence To Mow*, so it will be organising the 2024 Crap Game Competition. />

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

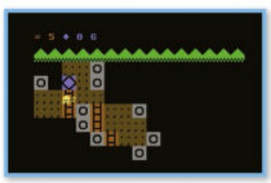
<!--- [NES] SHINJO'S MIDNIGHT ZONE IS STILL IN DEVELOPMENT BUT WON THE PLAYER'S CHOICE AWARD. --->

<!--- [NES] PIXELCRAFT GAMES WON TWO AWARDS FOR THE ADVENTURES OF PANZER: FRONTIERS WITH ITS WILD WEST SETTING. --->

Plans are underway to expand several games. "Byte-Off games often start as demos that serve as a fun, trivial little vacation from a developer's larger projects," explains Joe. "The games take on a life of their own – released on cartridge, and even to modern consoles such as Switch, Xbox, etc. We are also working hard on a *Best Of The Byte-Off* multicart, capturing this time and place for these demos all in one place, whether they grow bigger or exist perpetually only in their current state."

Joe also told us that NESmaker itself is undergoing major upgrades and improvements. "Big things are coming," he promises. "You can be a writer, artist, musician, or creative person and start making a game in a similar way as you would in other modern creation software such as GameMaker, Unity, Godot, Construct, Scratch, etc." You can play all the entries online via The RetroVerse at bit.ly/byteoff4 and visit thenew8bitheroes.com for more on NESmaker. </BODY>

## <INTRO> FIVE ESSENTIAL GAME JAMS AND COMPETITIONS </INTRO>



### BASIC 10LINER 2024

bunsen.itch.io

<Announcing its winners in April, *Dan The Digger* (C64) won the PUR-80 category, beating the likes of *Beer On Tap* and *10 UFO Chase*. />

### RESET 4K 2024

bit.ly/craptastic2024

<The Craptastic competition for C64 users challenges them to create a game in just 4096 bytes, like 2022 winner *Marble Boy*. />

### SMS POWER 2024

bit.ly/smspower2024

<Master System fans on the SMS Power forum voted RPG *Stygian Quest* as the 2024 coding competition winner, ahead of *Mai Nurse* and *Alter Ego*. />

# NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Acorn Atom:** Kees Van Oss converted Sloanysoft's *Jet Set Steamboat Willie*. Chug on over to bit.ly/steamboat-atom />

<**Amiga:** The 2024 Amiga Game Jam theme is The Sequel That Never Was; submissions are due by 30 November. You can enter at bit.ly/amigamejam />

<**Amstrad CPC:** Juan Martinez's wonderful-looking *The Heart Of Salamanderland* will get a poly.play physical edition. There's more info over at bit.ly/salamanderland />

<**Atari 2600:** Magovinna released the mediaeval *Coarse Blade* and shoot-'em-up *Aliens, Plasma Guns & Chewing Gum*. Find out more by visiting bit.ly/magovinna />

<**Atari ST:** The prolific Haplo has converted *Tenebra 2*, with 8-bit and interlaced graphic modes. Name your own price and grab it from bit.ly/tenebra-2 />

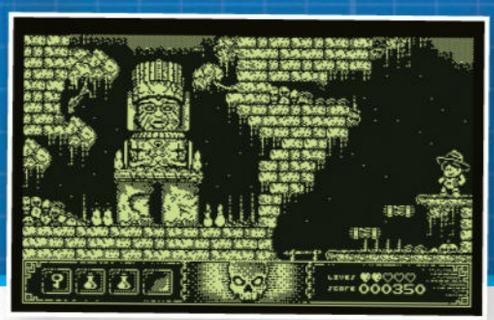
<**BBC Micro:** Tony Kingsmill released text adventure *Ghostship Delgado*, also for Acorn Electron. The game is free, but paying $2 gets useful clue sheets, a map, and source files. Discover it at bit.ly/ghostship-delgado />

<**Intellivision:** Three digital ROMs (*Parsec*, *Fox's Quest* and *Lode Runner*) from developer Blah Blah Wolf Wolf are currently available to buy at bit.ly/blah-intellivision />

<**Nintendo DS:** *Boulder Crash 3D* is new from Brig. Name your price and tunnel your way over to bit.ly/bouldercrash-ds />

<**PICO-8:** *Stickyfoot* from Andrew Reist is now playable online at bit.ly/stickyfoot Morning Toast's *Steel Hunter* (bit.ly/steelhunter), is inspired by the Atari 2600 game *Sea Caves*. Finally, the brilliant *Tiny Hawk Pico Skater* from Morgan Quirk has a separate park editor, so skate on over to bit.ly/tinyhawk-pico />

<**Various:** Monochrome Productions released platformer *TONY: Montezuma's Gold* (below), inspired by filmmaker Tony Halik, with unique filters for its 1-bit graphics. Digital editions are at itch.io for Atari 8-bit, C64 and Amiga, with physical editions from Retronics.EU and K&A Plus. More info at bit.ly/tony-montezuma />



## CHAMPION CODER

# ANDY 'HEWCO' HEWITT

<INTRO> ANDY'S FIRST COMPUTER WAS A VIC-20, AND HE STILL ENJOYS CREATING GAMES FOR THE CLASSIC HOME MICRO </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: WOLVERHAMPTON WEBSITE: HEWCO.UK / HEWCO.ITCH.IO FORMAT: VIC-20 PREVIOUS GAME: VIC NIBBLER, CHEESY TRIALS, PUMPKID, PINK WINDMILL BLITZ WORKING ON: EMU'S MASSIVE HUNT (NEEDS 35K EXPANSION) />

**WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT?**

<Turbo Rascal (TRSE). It is a complete development IDE I discovered early on and something about it just clicked. It's like a cross between C and Pascal and is perfectly tuned to making games and demos on vintage computers and consoles. Code is converted to assembler which makes it very fast and efficient, and it includes built-in editors for graphics, sprites, and music. With a huge amount of encouragement from Nicolaas, author of TRSE, I have helped to expand its VIC-20 support. It is worth a look if you have the desire to make your own games. />

<!--- ANDY HEWITT WITH HIS GAMES, PUBLISHED BY THE FUTURE WAS 8-BIT (TFW8B.COM/). --->

**WHAT INFLUENCED YOUR CURRENT GAME, EMU'S MASSIVE HUNT?**

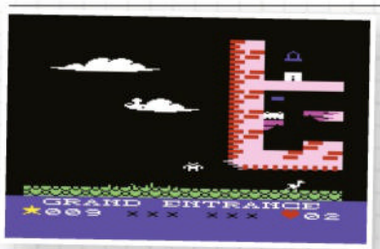
<It started with a library I had written that makes it really easy to create faux-character sprites (hewco.uk/lbm8) – my first thought was to create a game like *Jet Set Willy*. I doodled a miniature emu sprite and from there it kind of took on a life of its own. I had the help of a talented musician by the name of Mince: Unknown. He did wonders with just one voice channel. For the next one, we'll expand out to use more voice channels. Rod from the Future Was 8 Bit gave lots of encouragement and good ideas of his own. There's so much gone into it, I think it is the best game I have made to date. />

**WHAT OTHER HOMEBREW DEVELOPERS INSPIRE YOU?**

<I loved the style of games that Jason Justian (Chysn) produced; he will be sadly missed in our VIC community. The games made by the elusive Derek are hugely fun and accomplished. Then there's the Denial forum, with has so many contributors creating some seriously impressive games and utilities. />

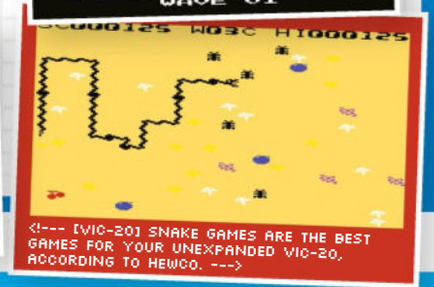
**WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?**

<I have several on the go including games like *VIC Rockman* and *Omega Race*, and I have a unique idea for another game the LBM8 library would be perfect for. Watch this space! />




<!--- [VIC-20] THE ENTRANCE TO THE PINK WINDMILL, WHICH IS FILLED WITH TAPES, CASSETTES, AND JOYSTICKS TO COLLECT. --->

<!--- [VIC-20] ANDY'S BRILLIANT ADAPTATION OF ARCADE SNAKE GAME NIBBLER IS STILL AVAILABLE ON CARTRIDGE. --->




<!--- [VIC-20] SNAKE GAMES ARE THE BEST GAMES FOR YOUR UNEXPANDED VIC-20, ACCORDING TO HEWCO. --->

## DATA BURST

# TX-1696

<INFO FORMAT: SPECTRUM NEXT (50HZ ONLY) CREDITS: LUCKY RED FISH / TECHNOSHED SOFTWARE PRICE: £39 (PHYSICAL), £34 (DOWNLOAD & PRINT), £8 (SOUNDTRACK DOWNLOAD), £21 (SOUNDTRACK VINYL) WEB: TECHNOSHEDSOFTWARE.COM />

<BODY> **Stardate 1696: the last human-populated planet in the galaxy comes under alien attack.** Fortunately, a lone pilot flying the experimental Taris Xavia craft warps into the system and uses its advanced weaponry to fight back across five different planets, to wipe out the alien threat. That lone pilot is you.

Holding Fire powers up your ship's Beam weapon, while shooting weapon cases reveals a ?, which adds a random power-up or an additional shield (you start off with two) when you pick it up. You can select from a variety of useful weapons and items, ranging from homing missiles to a powerful drone, which is handy as large bosses await you at the end of each stage. *TX-1696* is a classic horizontally scrolling shmup in the *R-Type* mould, with well-designed graphics and a pumping soundtrack from Richard Faulkner (with the option to change between seven different tracks on each level). It features other neat homages too, with one stage dedicated to *Salamander*. Gameplay is tricky but balanced, with bonus interludes, an excellent ending sequence, and hidden codes to access extra features. The five levels felt relatively short compared to similar games, and we would have loved more levels to increase the variety – but overall this is a very polished game that Next owners need to check out. </BODY>

**SCORE: 88%**

<!--- [SPECTRUM NEXT] THIS LEVEL IS CALLED BRET'S WORMS AND FEATURES LOTS OF THEM TO BLAST. --->

<!--- [SPECTRUM NEXT] THE GIANT FLAMES AND THE FIERY ENEMIES OF THIS LEVEL EVOKED THE CLASSIC SALAMANDER. --->

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] THE BONUS FRUIT SUCH AS THE CHERRY LOOK PARTICULARLY GOOD. --->

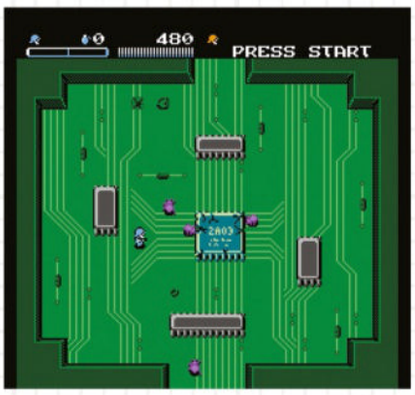
<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] THE QUEST FOR ARCADE ACCURACY INCLUDES BRILLIANT SOUND FX AND GREAT USE OF COLOUR. --->

## PAC-MAN RX

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM CREDITS: MIDNIGHT BREW GAMES (ALAN TURVEY) PRICE: $4.99 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / TAPE TBC WEB: BIT.LY/PACMANRX />

<BODY> **After remastered *RX* versions of *Lunar Rescue* and *Asteroids* (also available digitally with this game as *Arcade Pack RX 1* for $9.99), now it's the turn of everyone's favourite yellow pill-gobbler to be recreated.** Released to mark the 44th anniversary of the original arcade game, initial impressions are brilliant thanks to excellent loading screens and a stylish attract mode. In-game, everything looks arcade-accurate, with the smaller screen area used to give a full view of the maze. It also feels great to play, thanks to the careful recreation of the arcade game's enemy movements and redefinable keys. The sound is superb as well. Those who want an authentic arcade experience for their Spectrum should look no further than this excellent recreation. </BODY>

**SCORE:** 90%




<!--- [NES] BASIC BUGS ARE ATTACKING THE RICOH 2A03 CPU. --->

<!--- [NES] LATER LEVELS ADD MORE ENEMY TYPES AND GREEN CAPACITORS THAT CAN BE DESTROYED FOR POWER-UPS.. --->

## DATA MAN

<INFO FORMAT: NES CREDITS: DARKBITS (DEVELOPER), BROKE STUDIO (PUBLISHER) PRICE: $10 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / €50 (PHYSICAL CARTRIDGE) WEB: BIT.LY/DATAMAN-NES / BIT.LY/DATAMAN-CART />

<BODY> **Development of this *Robotron*-inspired title featured in issue 256's column, and the final release lives up to expectations.** One or two players must protect the central processor from attack, with swarms of enemies entering the screen. Shooting or throwing grenades will stop them with a clever glitch effect as the CPU takes damage. Collecting energy orbs increases your weapon strength and when full allows you to Overload, doing even more damage. *Data Man* is a great-looking NES game that will take patience to make progress – or a second, skilled player. </BODY>

**SCORE:** 86%

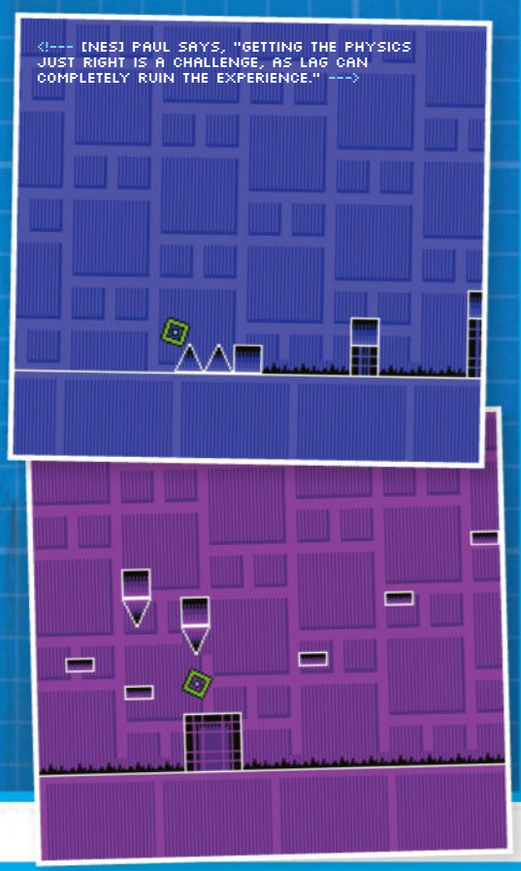
# THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

## PROCESSING

<INTRO> PAUL STULBERGER IS PART OF THE TEAM BRINGING THE STYLISH GEOMETRY DASH TO THE NES </INTRO>

<BODY> **After a project stalled, Paul Stulberger saw an opportunity to get involved.** "Zephyrside posted their WIP of *Geometry Dash* and I was very motivated to help," explains Paul. "The developer suddenly left, and I decided to see what I could finish by myself." Paul isn't alone on the project though and the team includes Ficus mcHousePlant, Zenith, AleFunky, alexmush, jroweboy and jaezu. "Jroweboy is doing amazing tricks for parallax, making the spikes blend in," says Paul. Jroweboy's excellent parallax effect relies on alternating CHR sets, as well as 144 copies of the background pre-scrolled in the ROM.

What form will the game take? "There will always be a free digital download," says Paul. "As for a physical release, I have reached out to RobTop and based on his response we can go from there." Levels can be imported from the original using Tiled, and Paul says there will be, "12 of the official levels, ending with Clutterfunk and Theory Of Everything, all painstakingly hand-recreated tile by tile to line up with the originals." Paul is also hoping to include a level creator in the final release. You can find out more by following @kandowontu on X/Twitter for the latest updates. </BODY>



<!--- [NES] PAUL SAYS, "GETTING THE PHYSICS JUST RIGHT IS A CHALLENGE, AS LAG CAN COMPLETELY RUIN THE EXPERIENCE." --->

# HOT TOPIC

**RETROBATES** MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

# REVISITING THE PSP

## The team look back at Sony's high-powered portable

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [PSP] *WipEout Pure* was excellent and received a staggering amount of great free content.

**The PlayStation Portable was a phenomenal piece of kit that boasted some superb titles.** To celebrate its 20th anniversary, Nick, Tim and Darran recall their favourite moments with Sony's exceptional handheld.

### DARRAN

What was your first encounter with an actual PSP?

### NICK

It was at HMV in Chelmsford, before the UK launch – I don't know for sure, but I suspect it was an imported console owned by a member of staff. I wasn't allowed to actually play it, but *Ridge Racer* looked stunning.

### TIM

Someone on *games™* had one delivered to the office and when I asked them if I could have a go they got all huffy and said, "Errgh, I've just put it away, and I'm not taking it out again." So it was a while after that when I was working on *Play* that I got to use one.

### DARRAN

Hah, that sounds like something I would have said, Tim. Despite regularly covering it in the news section of *games™*, I didn't get my hands on one until my Japanese machine turned up with several games. *Ridge Racer* drew a lot of impressed gasps from numerous people, including those that weren't typical gamers. Does everyone have a favourite launch game?

### NICK

It was *WipEout Pure* for me. I'd loved the series for years, and the handling felt far better than *WipEout Fusion*. It just kept getting better too, the free DLC doubled the amount of tracks available.

### TIM

I felt that *Lumines* was a pretty good launch game, though I actually played it more on the Xbox 360 to be honest.

> "I used to get annoyed that so many of those games would eventually end up on the PS2"
>
> NICK THORPE

### DARRAN

Although *Ridge Racer* and *Lumines* were great, I sunk a huge amount of time into *Everybody's Golf*, which was ace. Did the system surprise you in any way as it matured?

» [PSP] *Ridge Racer* was a fantastic launch title that neatly highlighted the power of Sony's first handheld.

### TIM

The number of games that were spin-offs from PS2 games – *God Of War*, *GTA Stories*, *Metal Gear* etc. Dinky made-to-measure stuff for Sony's handheld.

### NICK

I used to get annoyed that so many of those games would eventually end up on the PS2 – at the time, I felt like they should have stayed exclusive to drive PSP sales.

### TIM

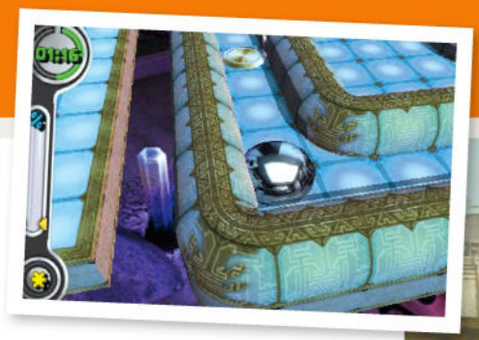
Yeah, I played *Liberty City Stories* on the PS2, it felt really weird.

### DARRAN

It's possible that they were being ported to PS2 in order to recoup sales. I loved how much retro content was available, it's largely why it featured in our review section so much. Does anyone have a favourite example of a retro-related title?

### NICK

*Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded* was the one I spent



» [PSP] *Archer Maclean's Mercury* was another solid launch game and went on to have several sequels.

the most time with, mainly for *Street Fighter II Turbo*, *Mercs* and *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. Also *Metal Slug Anthology* was a great collection.

**TIM**

Not sure if I reviewed it, but I did enjoy the *Power Stone Collection* as I didn't get to play them on the Dreamcast. I didn't enjoy *Street Fighter Alpha 3 MAX* though – it was way too difficult to pull off moves.

**NICK**

I had that problem with *BlazBlue*, come to think of it.

**DARRAN**

That probably explains why Namco released a plastic topper for the d-pad. I know we're obviously game-focussed but the PSP was pitched as, 'The Walkman of the 21st century,' so did anyone actually use it regularly for films and music?

**NICK**

I had a pretty good dedicated MP3 player and stayed well away from UMDs, but I used to put TV shows on my memory stick for when I travelled between uni and home – mostly things like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, since cartoons compressed well.

**TIM**

Nah, I was still using a portable CD player back then, until I got an iPod Mini.

**DARRAN**

I ended up loading my PSP with a few of my favourite albums but it was mainly about the games for me. Speaking of which, *Monster Hunter* games were huge

» [PSP] Konami was a big supporter of the PSP releasing numerous *Metal Gear* games and some great Japanese retro collections.

on the PSP. I assume you both played them, right?

**NICK**

Shockingly, I've never actually played any *Monster Hunter* games. I know they really helped the system do well in Japan though.

**TIM**

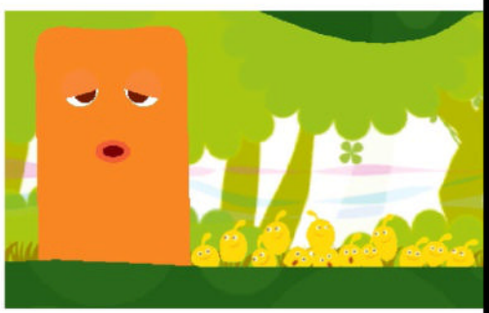
Sadly not. I didn't play any *Monster Hunter* until *World*. Well maybe not all that sadly, as there's been many quality-of-life improvements since the PSP days, it sounded like a bit of a nightmare to play.

**DARRAN**

I think *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite* was one of the first games I bought for my PSP Go, that console was far too ahead of its time. I've recently been using a PSP 3000 via the RetroTink 4K and it looks incredible. Does anyone else still use their console?

**NICK**

Yeah, I replayed *Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice* on stream recently, and put a lot of time into *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge* before that. It's a miracle really, the battery should have exploded by now.



» [PSP] A number of franchises debuted on PSP, including *LocoRoco*, *Patapon* and *Metal Gear Acid*.

» [PSP] The PSP had something of a push from Sony in 2009 with *LittleBigPlanet*, *Gran Turismo*, *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines* and *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge* all launching within months of each other.

» [PSP] Tim has extremely fond memories of Capcom's *Power Stone Collection* as he never played the Dreamcast versions.

# READERS REACT

## The best PSP launch games, according to you

**Leafy Leon**
*Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition* was the best!

**Retro Game Den**
*WipEout Pure* was the game that convinced me that I needed to get a PSP on launch.

**Lars Schade**
*Ridge Racer* – absolute top-notch version, and *Ridge Racer 2* is even better.

**Old Snake**
*Metal Gear Acid*. Who else thought it was a real *Metal Gear* game and were surprised that it's just a card game... luckily a good one.

**Jason**
*Lumines*. Addictive, beautiful and banging.

**Jamie Robinson**
*WipEout Pure*. It's one of my favourite racing franchises. Being able to play it on a handheld was cool.

**Christlevania**
*Lumines* was the perfect game to sell what the PSP was trying to be. It carried the tradition started with the Game Boy of launching with an addictive puzzle game, while also being a cutting-edge audiovisual experience to show off what the hardware was capable of.

**Gavvie-san**
*Lumines*. Whilst *Ridge Racer* and *Metal Gear Acid* were great in their own right, *Lumines* was always to hand for a quick couple of rounds/hours. Amazing soundtrack too!

**Jermaine RPG**
The obvious choices are *Lumines* or *Ridge Racer*, however I wouldn't sleep on *Untold Legends: Brotherhood Of The Blade*. If you can get some friends to link up for that sweet co-op it's even better. It has surprisingly deep mechanics for an early PSP game.

**Paul**
*WipEout Pure* is probably my favourite *WipEout* game.

**Jazzerman**
*Lumines*. I loved taking my PSP with me when I was out and I spent so many hours enjoying that game with its amazing soundtrack.

**Martin**
First initial thought would be the fantastic *Ridge Racer*, but I've actually played *WipEout Pure* a lot more and it's arguably one of the best entries in the series.

# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

**SEGA KATANA**

"One of the coolest systems I own is this Sega Dreamcast development system. It was another broken system (due to a shipping incident by a previous owner). Thankfully, it is easy to work on and is now part of a complete Dreamcast development environment. I could write *Shenmue IV* on it if I had the time (and talent)!"

**AMOUNT PAID: £500**

**PC ENGINE DUO**

"I love the original PC Engine but using it with the CD-ROM drive can be a pain, which is why the Duo is so nice – I can plug it in and go. My PCE Duo was another bargain, bought broken for £10 and fixed by simply pushing the power connector back in place."

**AMOUNT PAID: £10**

**MULTI-TRAIN CONTROLLER**

"Even though there are many official *Densha de Go!* Controllers, I found this third-party one at a Hard Off store in Tokyo. It's rather cool as you can change what game it supports and how it operates by changing the 'gate' in the middle. This one was sold as 'junk' and came with all the extras. Rare and rather expensive normally, but this piece of 'junk' works perfectly."

**AMOUNT PAID: £30**

## BIO

**NAME:**
Alan Hammerton

**LOCATION:**
Guildford, UK

**ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:**
£30,000

**FAVOURITE SYSTEM:**
PC Engine

**FAVOURITE GAME:**
WipEout

# ALL ABOARD!

## Meet the collector who channels a love of trains and videogames into one very impressive collection

**Alan Hammerton has a fascination with trains as well as a love for videogames.** These two things collide in one game that caught his collecting eye. Between working as an editor for Fusion Retro Books, Alan pulls trains out of the station on time in the *Densha de GO!* series. "Growing up, I was always interested in big machines," Alan begins. "It was natural to be drawn towards games like *Densha de GO!* I've realised that I get the most enjoyment out of games and systems that are a bit odd and different. I love a game of *Doom* as much as the next retro gamer, but there's even more challenge in stopping a 12-car commuter train at precisely the right spot in the station."

Alan takes his train controllers to retro events around the UK and these experiences have created some fond memories. "One time, a father was showing his son how to play the game, and you could see the little boy itching to get on. I walked past a few times and the kid was still playing and enjoying himself each time. Also, during lockdown, I used games to travel virtually. *Densha de GO! Hashirou Yamanote Sen* had released on PS4 supporting the PSVR headset. Having been on the real Yamanote line in Tokyo several times, I was surprised to realise how much detail was in the game. Looking around, I recognised buildings and locations that I'd been to in real life. All I needed was a Coco Ichibaya curry and a Kirin beer to feel I was there."

We asked Alan what his favourite *Densha de Go!* controller is. "That's a tough one. There are so many controllers across the series, but the one I like is the PlayStation 2 controller. It's solidly built, with a satisfying mechanical clunk on the levers. It also has a working speedometer, a feature only available on this controller."

It isn't just *Densha de GO!* controllers and games that Alan collects. He also enjoys obscure computers, consoles and handhelds. We asked Alan how he got into this side of collecting. "Accidentally!" he chuckles. "I've always had a soft spot for systems that were never popular or commercially released in the UK. I also still have my *Home Computer Course* magazines that feature in-depth looks at a different system in each issue. I remembered so many but had never actually seen them. I set myself a challenge to get hold of every system featured, and it just got out of hand. These days, I have odd, rare and unusual systems from all over the world, but it's getting increasingly expensive to collect them."

We finish our chat asking Alan what his favourite obscure system is. "The rule for me is that the worse the system, the more I like it. If you pushed me, I'd have to say I like the Mattel Aquarius," he says. "It's utterly awful but has a certain charm. Why Mattel ever thought it would sell is beyond me, it was obsolete even before release. You must admit that an Aquarius with its mini-expander, joypads and cassette deck sitting on a desk looks rather smart."

## Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

### COMMODORE 64GS

"I picked up this bare 64GS in the very early days of my collection when car boot sales were a very different place for retro collectors than they are today. I got it for a stupid price and have been buying the bits needed to make it a complete console."

**AMOUNT PAID: 50P!**

## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

### CROSS HIGHWAY

■ "In the early Eighties, I saved to buy a Nintendo Game & Watch. I asked my parents for Mario Bros, but they bought me Bandai's *Cross Highway* instead. Even though I was massively upset at the time, I grew to love that game. On a trip to Tokyo in 2019, whilst exploring Nakano Broadway, I found a mint *Cross Highway* handheld and purchased it on the spot. This little handheld holds so much nostalgia, especially as my parents are no longer around."

**PAID: 3,000 YEN (ABOUT £25 AT THE TIME)**

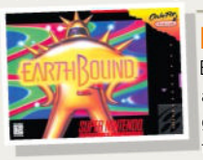
# BARGAIN HUNT

## Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

### PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

There are still plenty of original PSP handhelds out there with used ones costing under **£50,** sometimes with a game or two included. Those wanting something boxed, with the paperwork, and in good condition should look to pay closer to **£70.**




### EARTHBOUND

Buying a complete US copy will set you back nearly **£1,000** with a cart-only copy being over **£300.** Unless you require the original game, your cheapest option is to seek out a SNES Mini or play it on the Switch via its online service.

### WAVE RACE 64

Riding the waves isn't particularly cheap with complete PAL copies in good condition sailing for over **£35.** You can take the shortcut and get a cart-only copy for about **£12.**

### THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS

Time Warp's classic platformer seems to be getting harder to find on the C64 with only one copy selling recently for over **£40** albeit complete and in good condition.

### THE MOVIES

Lights, camera, action can be had for **£3** if you don't mind a used copy. Those wanting a new, sealed copy will have spare change for popcorn after spending **£5.**

### KNIGHT LORE

Most copies sell for around **£10** which includes the instructions and card box. Recently there have been examples of copies in very good condition nearly reaching **£30** in auctions.

### SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

This iconic future sports game from The Bitmap Brothers regularly sells for about **£25** for a boxed complete Amiga copy. If you don't fancy competing for that version, you can buy the budget release of the game for under **£20.** Score!

### EVERYBODY'S GOLF 2 (PSP)

Getting on the green isn't as expensive as it's in real life as used copies of this entertaining chibi golf title can be bought for as little as **£8.** If you're happy with just a UMD of Clap Hanz's classic game you'll be able to land one for well under a fiver.

HOW MUCH?!

### SONY PLAYSTATION DEBUGGING KIT

Have you ever wanted to check for errors on your PlayStation discs before playing them? Well now you can by purchasing a fetching blue debugging kit for **£2,300** and while away the hours finding input and output problems.

Prices correct at time of print

# TYCOON TIME

## Adam Barnes rediscovers his most beloved comfort games

**Call me a loser if you must, but there's a thrill to be found with a fresh install of Windows.** I'm one of those people who periodically factory resets Windows on an annual basis, And I find there's a joy in it. In doing so, I'm forced to make an active decision about what has the honour of being installed onto the hard drive first. Naturally it's always that Edge replacement, but after that the world is tantalisingly my oyster. For me, it's a process that gets me thinking more decisively about what I want to play. If I've upgraded the PC, then there's usually a high-end game that I've put off playing until I can boot it up, switch every setting to Ultra without looking and enjoy it without being able to count the frames. But there's still the classics that I always seem to make sure are installed: *Baldur's Gate*, *Factorio*, *World Of Warcraft*, *The Sims*, *Half Life* (*1*+*2*), *Binding of Isaac* and *Diablo II*. There are others that slip in and out based on my mood at the time, but these are the ones that I tend to install without fail just in case the urge to give them an umpteenth go rolls around.

But there's a duo that hold a particularly special place on each new Windows. *Transport Tycoon* and *RollerCoaster Tycoon* (OK, honestly, it's *1* and *2* here, so not technically a duo) get the supreme respect of being the first on each new hard drive. Moreover, where the others in this circle of retro-gaming life are typically there 'just in case', I almost can't resist booting these two up for yet another round. There's something inexhaustible about them.

Now of course, the tycoon genre by its very nature is infinite. *Transport Tycoon* especially plops your trains, planes and automobiles business into a new procedurally generated map each time. But it's not *just* that these games are designed to be replayed, there's a magic in them that really, honestly I can't explain. When John Broomhall's jazz soundtrack kicks in and I'm placing tracks and demolishing villages that dare stand in my way, I'm locked in to another five-hour Sunday session. Even *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, which is decidedly more finite in its experience thanks to its defined campaign missions, still manages to tempt me every time. It's something I've pondered in the past: what is it in these games that speaks to me? The only answer I've been able to reach so far is that they offer a fairly logical, pragmatic topic – that of building a successful business – but the tools at your disposal and the decisions you make are solved with a degree of creativity. Do I need to build a roller-coaster with four corkscrews, three loops and the highest drop in the country to be a successful theme park? No, absolutely not, but I still *want* it.

But back in May I was required to switch from laptop to a desktop for work and again I could once again live out this fresh-start joy. In the past I've been fairly strict in sticking to *Transport Tycoon Deluxe*, the ultimate version of Chris Sawyer's excellent game: it's elegant in its simplicity. I enjoy picking a small town, naming my business after it and building a transport business with the explicit goal of helping that town to grow into the biggest metropolis on the map. It's the same goal every time, and I've not stopped finding pleasure in beating back all the AI competition as I work with this sole dedication in mind.

> "Transport Tycoon and RollerCoaster Tycoon get the supreme respect of being the first on each new hard drive"
> **ADAM BARNS**

**This time, however, I finally started to poke around with OpenTTD.** If you're not familiar with the name, it is an open source recreation of Sawyer's original, but expanded by dedicated tinkerers wanting to see more from the base game. It has been mind-blowing, quite frankly. Bigger maps, more vehicles, improved AI, construction improvements; I could go on. Imagine your comfort game, the one you always put on when you can't think of anything else to play. Now imagine there's a whole new campaign you never experienced, new characters to play or a whole new storyline you never heard about.

It's taken me this long to properly try OpenTTD, satisfied as I was with the original, but all of the new and updated features have changed my approach to the game. Where I once had a singular approach to my play, now I'm learning what I can really do with my interconnected network of transport. It has given a new lease of life to something that, for me anyway, hadn't even begun to go stale. It has made my comfort game less comfortable, but I'm locked in all the same.

### TRY THESE REMAKES

**WANT TO TINKER WITH OPEN SOURCE GAMES? TRY THESE NEXT**

**OPENRA**
Classic RTS games benefit from modern upgrades but this package is impressive for including *Red Alert*, *Command & Conquer* and *Dune 2000*.

**FREECIV**
*Civilization II* is a tough one to beat, but this open source equivalent is more about expanding the core ruleset than improving it.

**OPENMW**
*Morrowind* is the definitive *Elder Scrolls* experience. It's not just that OpenMW enhances that, but it comes with its own editor to create mods for it too.

**KEEPERFX**
*Dungeon Keeper* remains one of the best examples of its genre, but KeeperFX has given the modern custom content creators a platform to keep their passion alive.

[PC] I DON'T WANT TO ADMIT HOW LONG I SPEND EVERY TIME GENERATING THE FACE WITH THESE COOL NINETIES SUNGLASSES.
[PC] THE SOUNDS OF RCT AND TTD ARE PERHAPS WHAT TRIGGER MY NOSTALGIA BONES THE MOST. THE CAROUSEL TRACK GETS ME EVERY TIME.
Train Crash!
4 die in fireball after collision
[PC] YOU'D THINK AFTER SO MANY YEARS ON THIS GAME THIS SORT OF THING WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO ME ANYMORE...
[PC] THE PROBLEM WITH MODERN ENHANCEMENTS LIKE HIGHER RESOLUTIONS MEANS YOU ULTIMATELY CAN'T SWITCH BACK TO THE ORIGINAL SO EASILY.

[PC] I'D PROBABLY SAY I ENJOY ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON MORE GIVEN THE CREATIVE OPTIONS AVAILABLE, BUT REPEATING MISSIONS ISN'T ALWAYS FUN.
[PC] BLIZZARD ARE DOING REALLY FANTASTIC THINGS WITH WOW CLASSIC, THE PROBLEM IS THAT IT'S ABSORBING MOST OF MY TIME REPLAYING OLD CONTENT.
[PC] IT'S NOT JUST THE TYCOON GENRE THAT GETS ME HOOKED. I OFTEN FIND MYSELF WANTING TO HOP BACK ONTO SIMCITY 2000 FOR EXAMPLE.
[PC] PERHAPS THE ONLY FLAW IN TRANSPORT TYCOON IS THE FACT THAT THE OTHER ZONES JUST AREN'T THAT COMPELLING TO ME.
[PC] THE FACT THAT YOU CAN SORT TOWNS BY POPULATION IN OPENTTD IS A MIND-BLOWING ADDITION FOR ME.

# ESSENTIAL COMFORT GAMES

## Readers share the retro games they always end up returning to

**pete**
*Balloon Fight* has been an unexpected ever-present for me since it was included in the 3DS Ambassador program. Really simple, momentum-based controls that feel incredibly satisfying to master. Balloon Trip Mode has that oddly serene, solitary quality too. I love it.

**bVork**
*Doom II*. I can always find something new yet familiar with the game. The original id-developed campaign is great but what makes *Doom II* really special is the incredible amount of new maps continually made for it, using the same mechanics but providing a new experience every time.

**Keith Simpson**
For me it has always been C64 *Impossible Mission*. It always plays different and I'm still trying after 38 years to beat it without one single death... one day I'll succeed.

**Woody2610**
*Donkey Kong Country 1-3*. The warm, colourful and chunky graphics as well as their chilled and therapeutic soundtracks always make for a game I take great pleasure going back to.

**Alex Young**
*Chaos* on the Speccy. Gotta love 8-way wizard shenanigans –Gooey Blob for the win!

**Jason**
*Sensible World Of Soccer*. It's easy to pick up and get into, and brings back all those memories of being ten and not having a care in the world.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY...** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

## WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

» [Arcade] *Zoo Keeper*'s last reissue was on *Taito Legends* in 2005.

## A LOST CLASSIC

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

Why does no one ever talk about *Zoo Keeper* anymore? It's a genuinely fantastic game by Taito and has you running around the outside of an enclosure as you try and recapture the escaped animals. It's never on any Taito compilations and I'd love to replay it.

Jacob Brown

**Good news, Jacob. *Zoo Keeper* will be getting the Quarter Arcades treatment later this year. That will hopefully pave the way to it appearing elsewhere as well.**

## STAR LETTER

## PRIMED FOR ACTION

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

Now that Nintendo has finally released its first trailer for *Metroid Prime 4: Beyond*, I'm really hoping you'll be doing some extensive coverage on the series. I've always been a huge fan of the *Metroid* franchise – hell, I even enjoy *Metroid Prime Hunters*, *Metroid Prime Pinball* and *Metroid Prime: Federation Force*.

So I can imagine you can guess where this is going. When will you be publishing a *Metroid Prime* cover? It would be genuinely fantastic to learn more about the entire *Prime* series and why the first game had to go through so many iterations before it ended up being the masterpiece that still manages to impress me today. I loved your recent *Super Metroid* cover and *Metroid* book, but I'd love a *Metroid Prime* feature even more.

Regards,

Samantha Ross

**Glad to hear you have been enjoying the recent *Metroid* coverage, Samantha. If we can get suitable access, we'll be more than happy to run an article on the series. With any luck we'll have something lined up for nearer the new game's release.**

» [Switch] If we can get the relevant interviewees together we'll certainly look at the *Metroid Prime* series in a later issue.

## GNOCCHI DAY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

In Uruguay there is a tradition where on the 29th of each month, you get together with family and/or friends to eat gnocchi. I have lived in Scotland for a few years now, and I recently started to implement this tradition with friends over here.

Recently, chatting about videogames with friends, one of them mentioned *Bubble Bobble* was her favourite game ever. I did some research and saw there was a remake, *Bubble Bobble 4 Friends* on Switch. Any excuse is good to get to play videogames with friends, so I bought it so we could play it on Gnocchi Day. It also includes the original arcade version!

Last Saturday was Gnocchi Day for June, and we got together to eat and play *Bubble Bobble 4 Friends*. We laughed, yelled at the screen, wondered what the hell was going on plenty of times, but it was so much fun. It was a nice gaming memory that will hopefully repeat itself.

Last Monday was 1 July, so it was time to turn the page on my **Retro Gamer** 2024 calendar. And what is the game of the month for July? *Bubble Bobble*... it was a very nice coincidence, and I sent this same photo to the chat group where we coordinate Gnocchi Days with these friends. Thanks for choosing this game for the calendar so that it would show up right after we had a blast with these dragons.

Fernando Briano

**We're glad you and your friends are enjoying Gnocchi Day, Fernando. Darran enjoys playing the game with his daughter, although she's much better at it than he is.**

» Here's the image Fernando shared with his friends to celebrate Gnocchi Day.

## BLOG POST

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm an avid retro gamer and have been a subscriber for sometime now, each issue is eagerly awaited and enjoyed very much.

If I may through your mailbag, I'd like to mention that since July 2021 I've operated a retro-gaming blog called The Retro Joypad available at

» [DS] Mark is clearly a big fan of handhelds and regularly reviews games like *Elite Beat Agents* on his blog.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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# CONTACT US

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**Email:** retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [Switch] We're big fans of the Marvel Vs Capcom series, so will try and put some sort of article together soon.

theretrojoypad.blogspot.com – I feel there's a good variety of posts on there from reflections on gaming history to game and handheld reviews. I'm now getting close to 100 posts and I hope other readers of this magazine will find it an honest, nostalgic and enjoyable read.
Regards,
Mark Boulton

**Many thanks for sharing your blog with us, Mark. We're always impressed with those who find time outside work to channel their hobbies and wish you good luck with the blog.**

## SHORT AND SWEET

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
The recent announcement of *Marvel Vs Capcom Fighting Collection: Arcade Classics* has me wondering… does **Retro Gamer** have any plans to cover the *Marvel Vs Capcom* fighting games in the near future?
Regards,
Jeremiah Jones

**We did take a look at the series all the way back in RG 94. Crikey… that was 13 years ago. It feels like the series, or at least *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, is due some more coverage.**

## DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

### Darran's PSP bender

**We all know that Darran doesn't do things by halves when it comes to collecting and he's now fallen down the PSP rabbit hole. Before he went on The Back Page Podcast to discuss the system with Samuel Roberts he had about 25 games in his collection. He's now up to 66 games. Will he ever learn? Probably not.**

# Your say

**Every month, *Retro Gamer* asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…**

## What's your favourite PSP game?

» [PSP] *The 3rd Birthday* is an excellent addition to the *Parasite Eve* series, even if it is rather tough.

**Ana Lu**
I know it's multiplatform but I have to say *Puzzle Quest*. It's the perfect gem to have on a portable console. It's my go-to game when I need game comfort.

**Lillie**
*Phantasy Star Portable 2 Infinity*. Aww man, what an AMAZING sequel to the original. It's got great gameplay, a wide selection of loot to farm for, tons of missions, and some of my favourite characters in the entire series!

**Mr. Freeze**
*Brandish: The Dark Revenant*. This is a complete remaster of *Brandish* and is a fantastic journey. It's underrated to say the least. I love *Brandish*!

**Doug F**
*LocoRoco*. That game is the most unique game on the PSP. The music, the singing, gameplay, everything is perfect. I was happy to buy the soundtrack on vinyl when it came out and happy when it hit the PS4 as a remaster. It looks sharp at 4K.

**Simon Phipps**
*Metal Gear Acid*. I played it to death on the PSP. Very cool *Metal Gear* visuals and style and easy-to-get-into tactical gameplay on-the-go. The game story nicely paid off too. It's still my favourite *MGS* game. (I tried *Portable Ops* too on PSP but real-time on that system struggled so I never completed it.)

**TheStickyBun**
I enjoyed being able to play *SOCOM* since you could play it online together. That was a game-changer.

**AdamGS**
*Mega Man Maverick Hunter X*. It's just a sublime remake of an already great game. It also came with a surprisingly good prequel anime to watch as well!

**miva2**
*Disgaea 1* and *2*. They blew every other game out of the water in terms of features and crazy interactions. Still my favourite games!

**Nick**
*The 3rd Birthday* hands down. This game was a masterpiece.


retro GAMER

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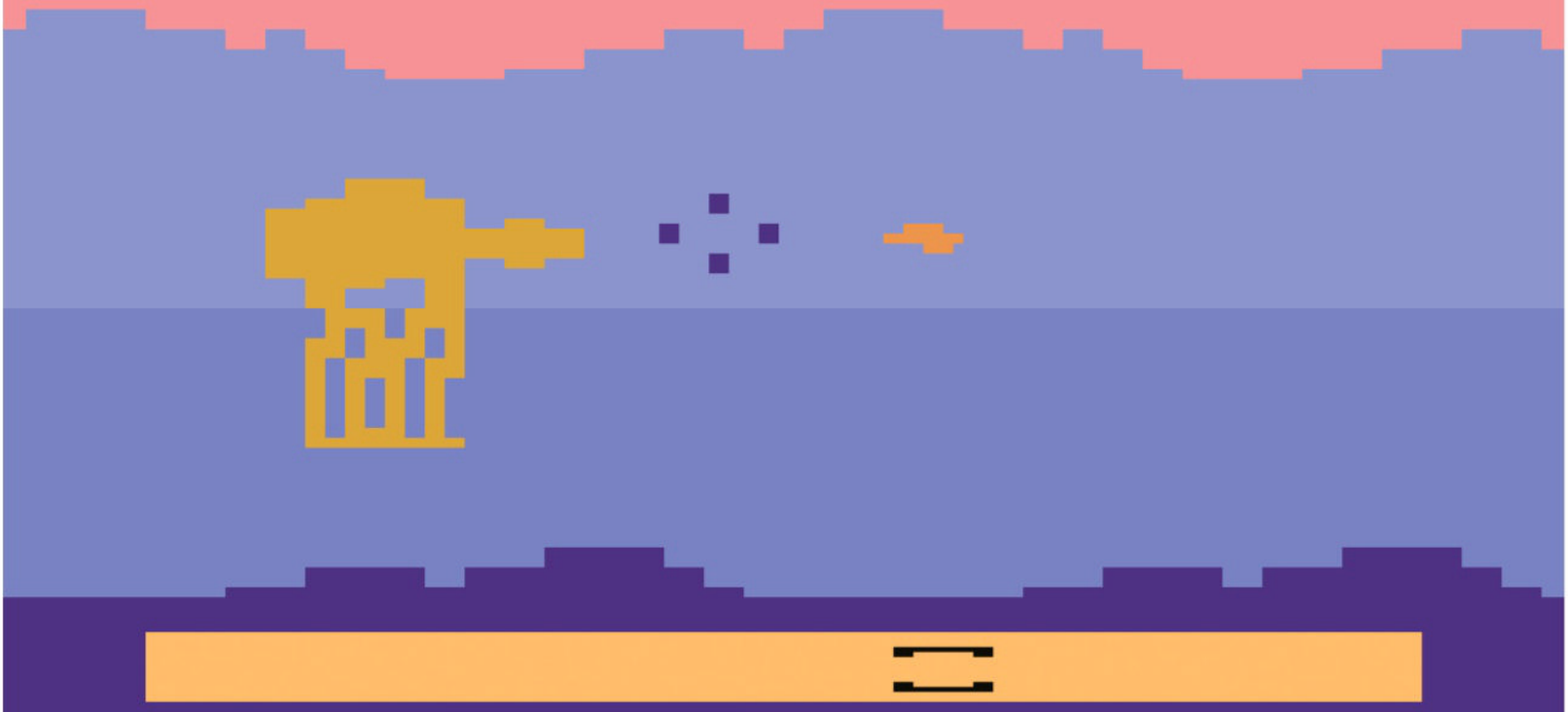

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# Everybody's Golf 2

## A SWING, BUT CERTAINLY NOT A MISS

» RETROREVIVAL



» PSP » 2007 » CLAP HANZ

**I recently had the pleasure of being invited onto *The Back Page* podcast to draft my ten essential PSP games with co-host Samuel Roberts.** As we went through our picks, I realised that I'd left no space for Clap Hanz's entertaining sequel, so consider this my unofficial 11th pick.

The original *Everybody's Golf* was one of the Japanese launch games I picked up for my PSP, along with *Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower* and *Lumines*. I sunk a huge amount of time into it and enjoyed its numerous gameplay modes and many unlockables. When Clap Hanz announced it would be releasing a sequel, I was immediately interested as the new game offered online play for up to 16 players. This felt like a huge deal at the time and meant I could now find more competitors than the usual suspects I used to play the original game with at work.

Even outside of its new online mode (which has long since been decommissioned) Clap Hanz's sequel still offered amazing value for money and essentially made the first game redundant due to it featuring more courses, characters and plenty of unlockable items. It admittedly offers little over the original mechanically, but that's not surprising when you consider how polished that game was anyway.

I've absolutely no interest in real-life golf, but I've always enjoyed its many videogame interpretations, from *Leaderboard* to *PGA Tour Golf* on the Mega Drive. Along with *Mario Golf* on the N64 this is easily my favourite golf game and my save file shows I've spent a worrying amount of time on it, over 70 hours in fact. In retrospect I probably should have included it within my line-up, but at least the draft made me revisit it again. And if you're interested in finding out what my ten picks actually were you can find out by listening to episode 180 of *The Back Page* podcast on Spotify or iTunes.

Shot!
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# ENDGAME

## TWISTED METAL: WORLD TOUR

» Surviving the vehicular violence of Twisted Metal isn't easy, but it's something that drivers are willing to risk in exchange for the prize – a single wish. Last year, good cop Carl Roberts wished for a world free of Twisted Metal, and earned a one-way trip to outer space. Now his sister's out to find him, so let's skip to the end and see how she does.

01

» Captain Jamie Roberts has won the contest and storms up to Calypso. As a cop, she should put an end to the barbaric Twisted Metal contest once and for all – but she doesn't.

02

» Her brother hasn't been seen since winning last year's contest, so Jamie's single wish is to see him again. Calypso, bearing a devilish grin, is all too eager to grant such a request.

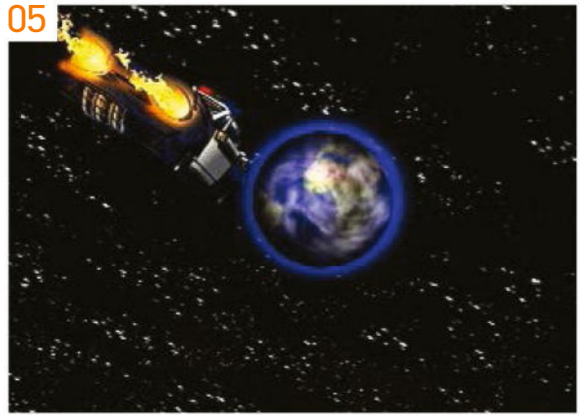
03

» After hearing the words fall from her mouth, Jamie begins to panic. The burnt-faced fiend is known for his tricky technicalities, but before she can get another word out, her wish is granted.

04

» Floating in outer space, Jamie is reunited with Carl, who has miraculously survived a whole year without food, water, oxygen or atmospheric pressure. As she invites him into her patrol car, he presumes that she also fell victim to Calypso. His assumption is dead wrong, though.

05



» Jamie's fear was a ruse – she anticipated Calypso's plan, and fitted her car with rocket thrusters in order to bring them both back to Earth. How did she know that Carl was in space, or that Calypso would helpfully send her car with her? That, dear readers, we'll never know.

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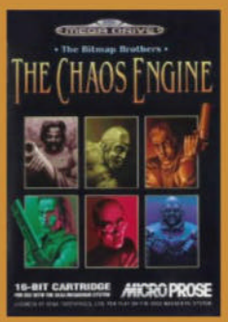


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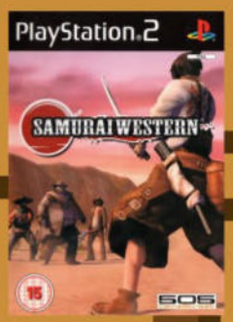


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